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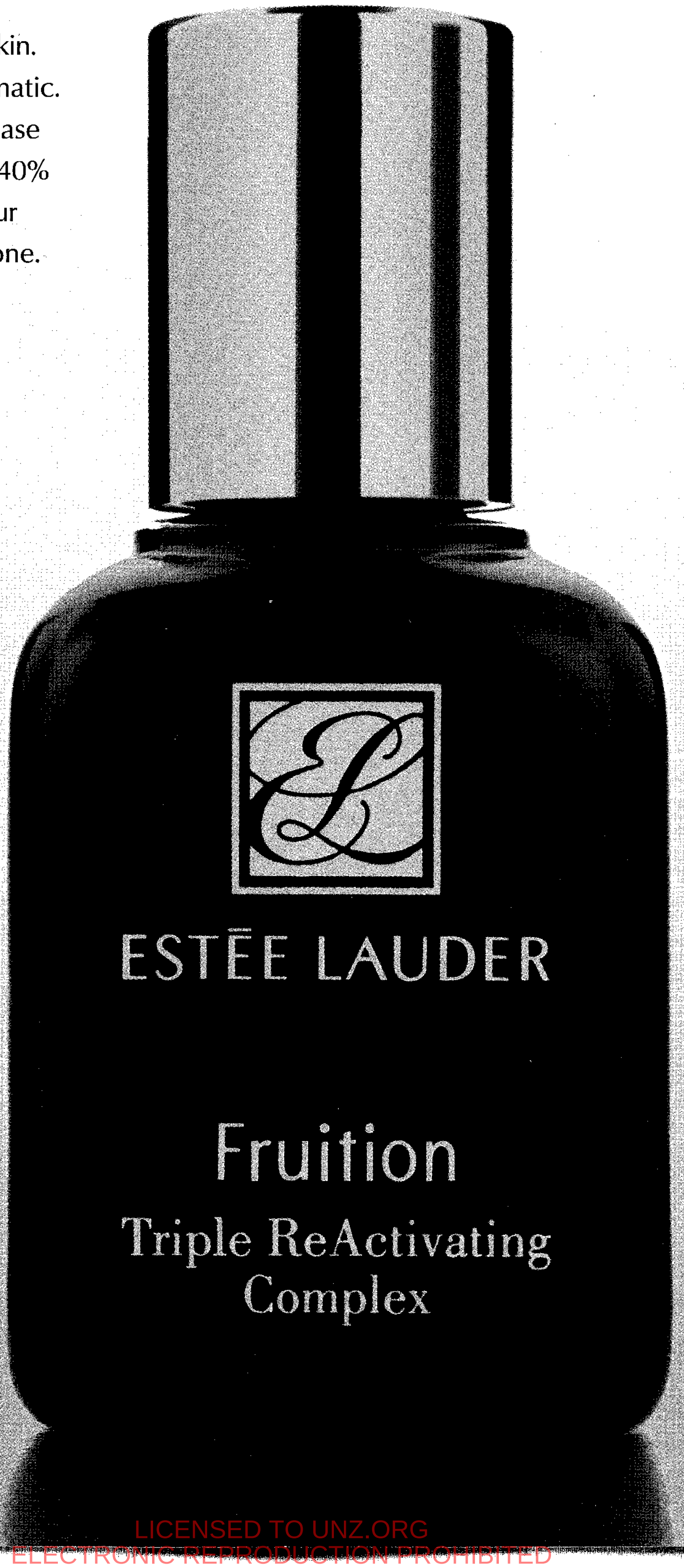
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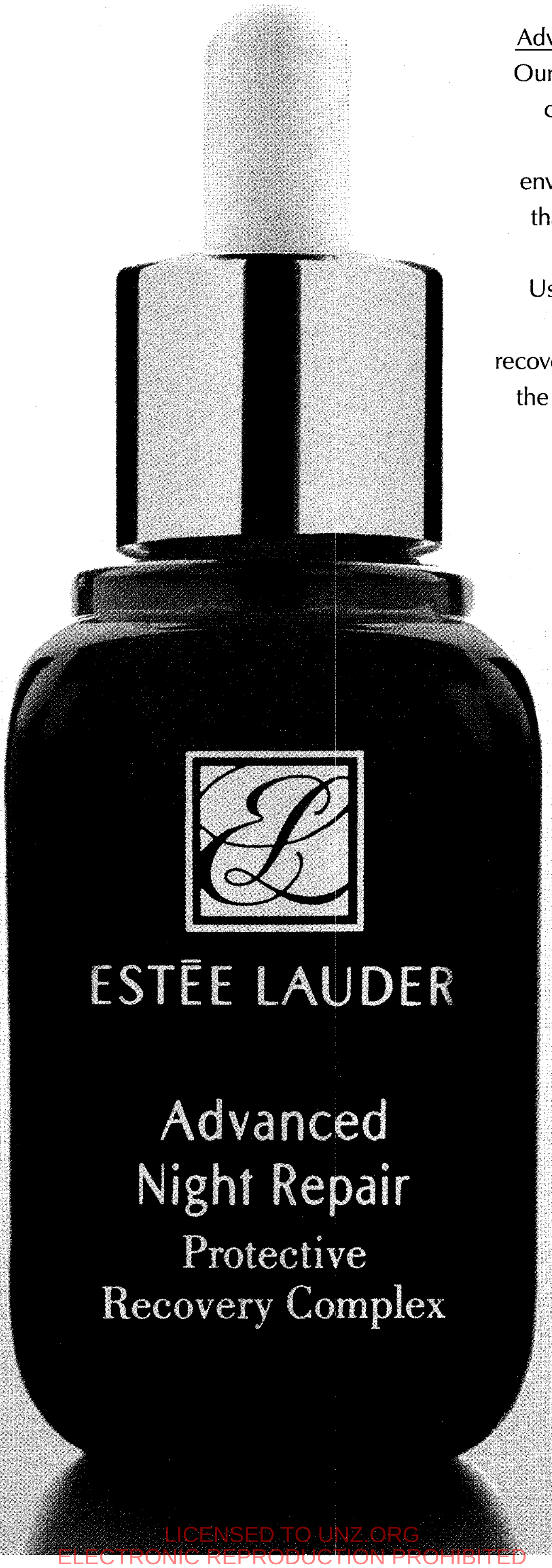

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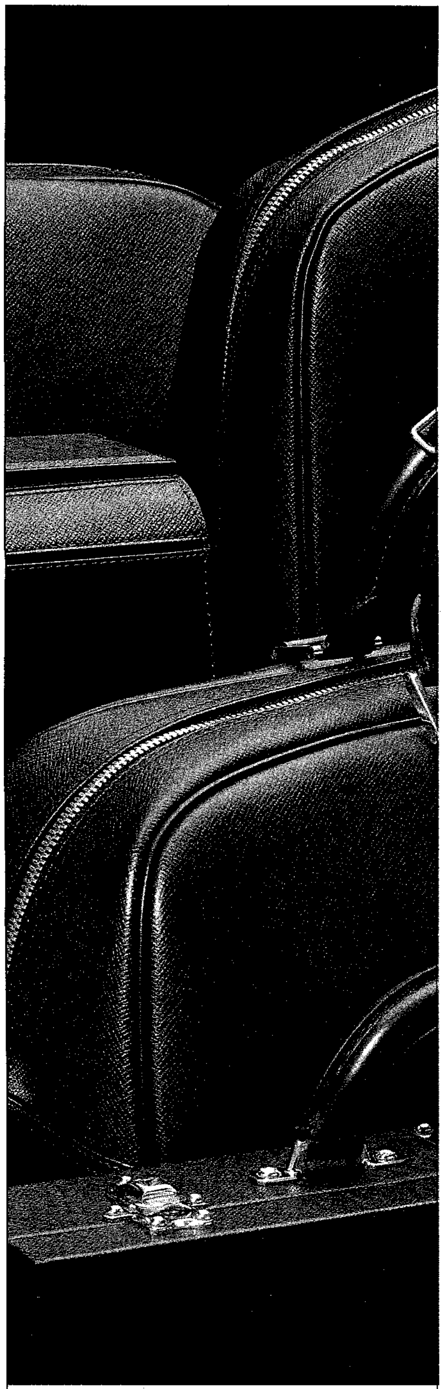

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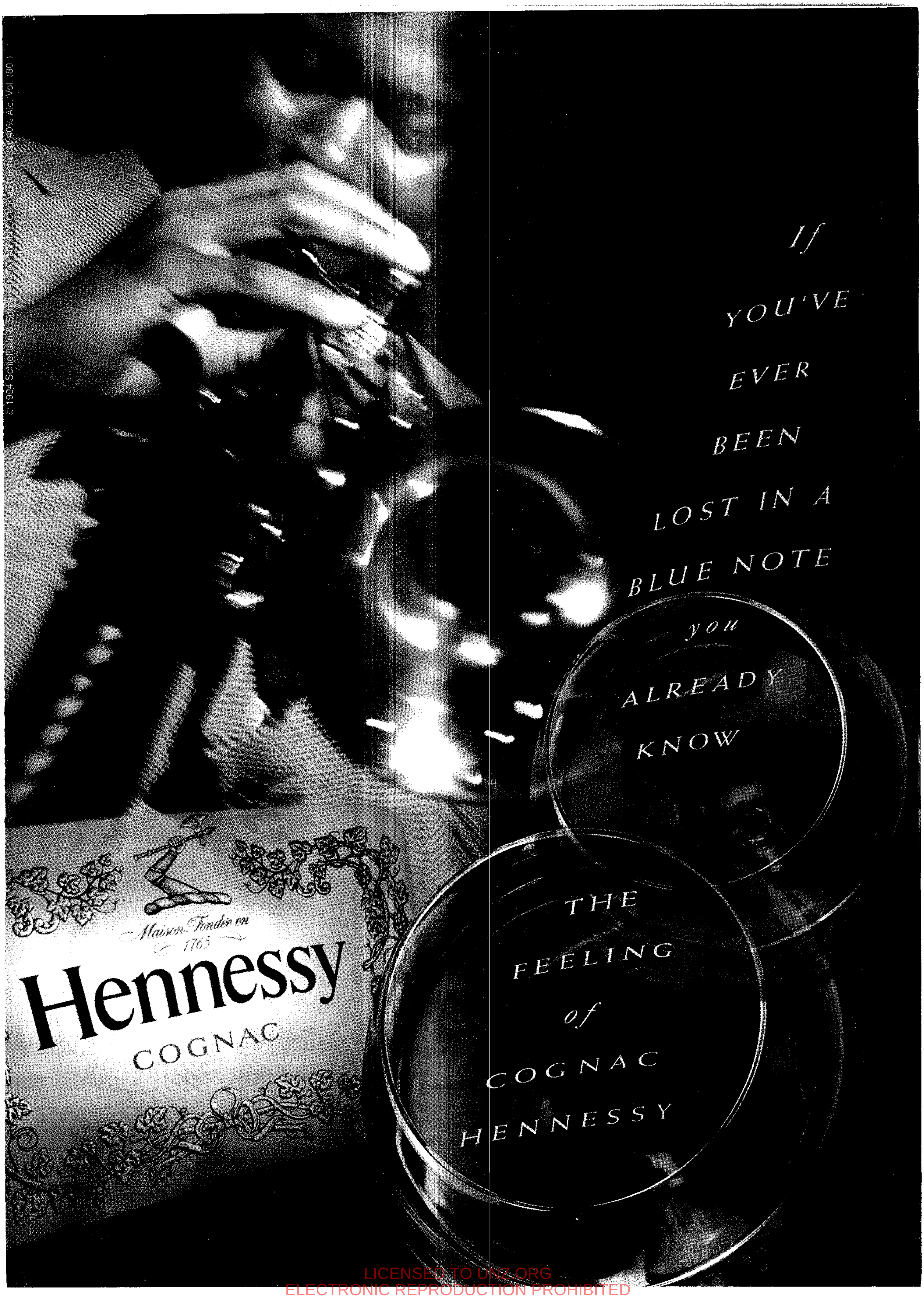

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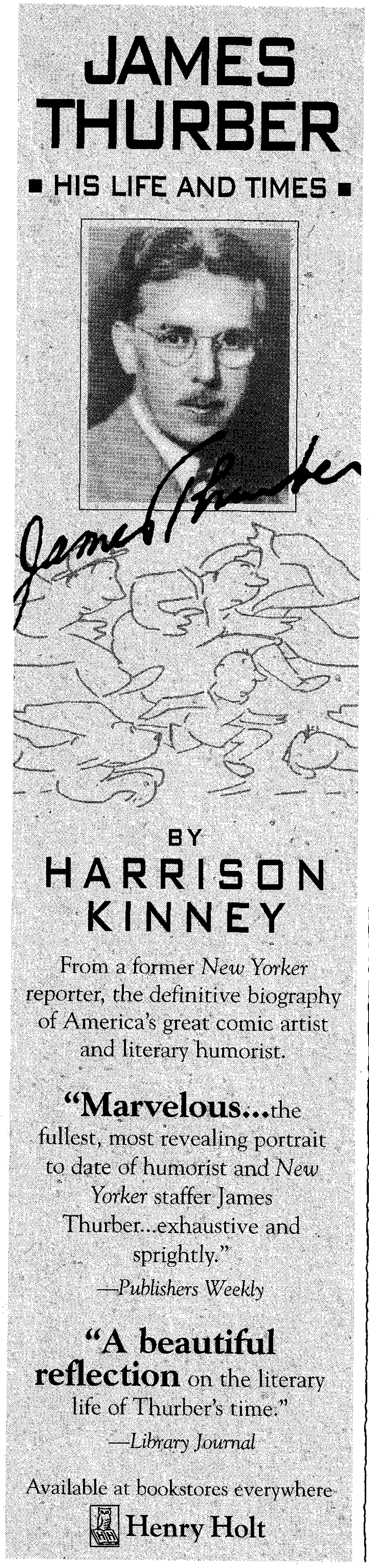
JAMES THURBER
■ HIS LIFE AND TIMES ■

James Thurber

BY HARRISON KINNEY

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# COMMENT

## POWER AND SUPERPOWER

*Exerting the one makes a country the other.*

When talks to end the Balkan wars began in Dayton, Ohio, a few weeks ago, there was relief and elation all around. Under State Department auspices, Bosnian, Serb, and Croat leaders had been brought to a more or less isolated airbase, there to remain in virtual captivity until either an agreement was reached or the talks broke down. The Serbian President, Slobodan Milosevic, complained about being "locked up like a monk," and at least one of his colleagues managed to get his mistress admitted to the compound as a member of a European delegation, yet the ploy worked. What really made the success of the talks possible, however, was that the Clinton Administration had at last used American power—militarily, in the NATO bombing campaign at the end of the summer, and politically, in the intensive shuttle diplomacy undertaken by Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke.

The peace deal—one that for four years European and United Nations negotiators had failed dismally to arrange—was and is welcome. But it offers the United States no escape from Bosnia. The pride many Americans initially took in the Dayton accord has been tempered by the realization that it obliges the Administration to follow through on a long-standing commitment to send twenty thousand American troops to police it. As that fact dawned, many Americans who had favored activism got nervous. Senator Bob Dole, whose championing of the Bosnian cause had helped goad the Administration to act, supported the deployment, but very grudgingly. "I think it's a mistake," he said, and predicted gloomily, "I know I'll get a few whacks out there." The early whackers included his isolationist rivals for the Republican Presidential nomination, Phil Gramm and Pat Buchanan.

For President Clinton, the political risk is far higher. His Administration had come into office promising to do something about Bosnia but had quickly opted to relegate Bosnia to a second tier of priorities. Its sympathies for the Bosnians remained intact, but it was unwilling to do much more than prevent the British and the French,

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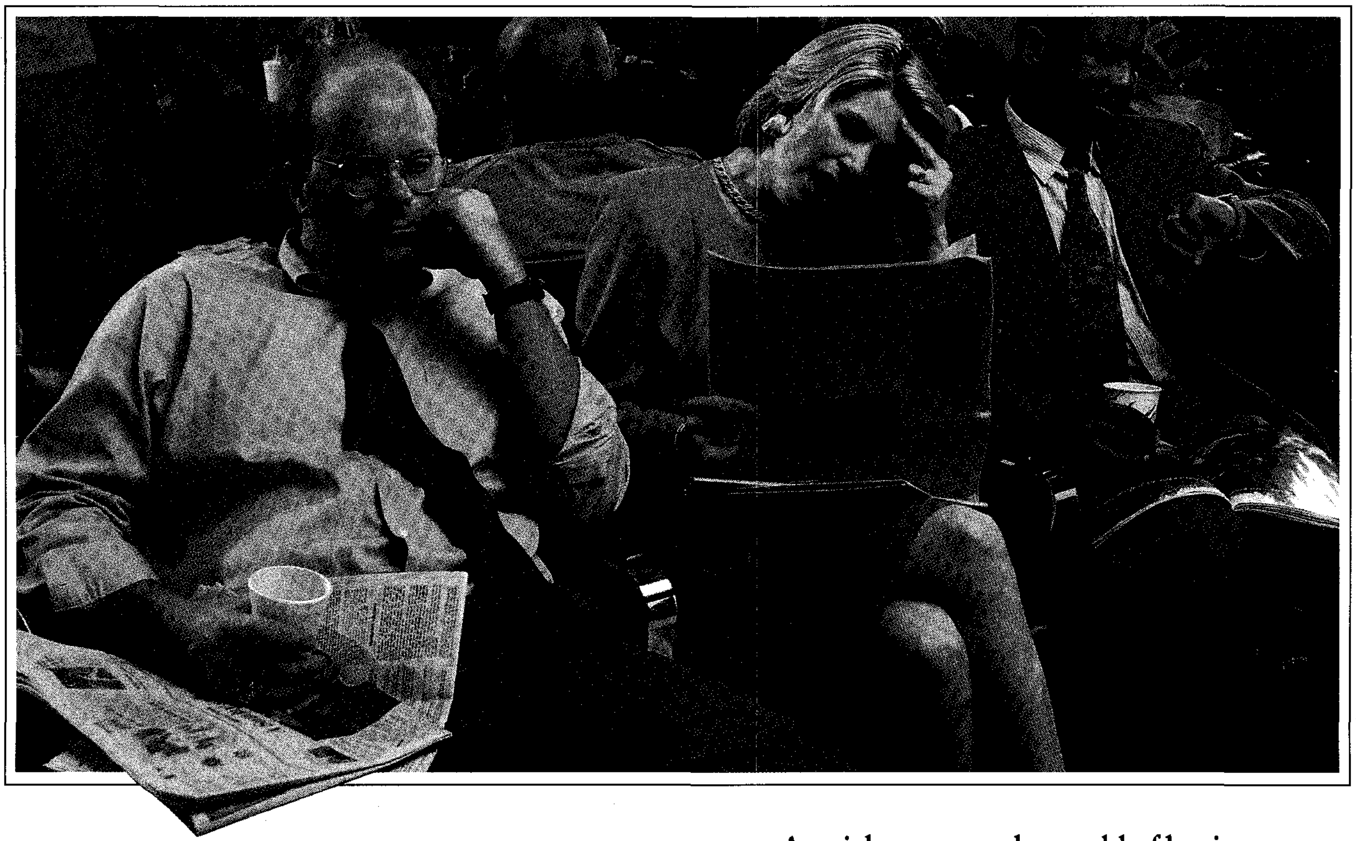

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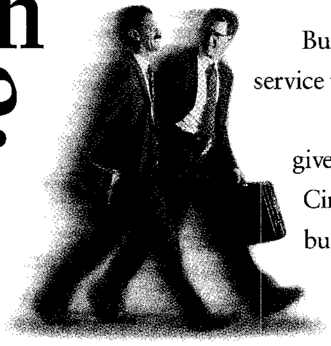

Victoria Roberts

*"An 'Irish divorce' doesn't have quite the same ring to it as a 'Mexican divorce.'"*

• •

through a pliable United Nations Secretariat, from giving the Serbs their victory. What prompted the Administration to act in the summer of 1995 was not a moral change of heart but the fact that UNPROFOR, the U.N. peacekeeping force in Bosnia, was on the brink of an ignominious withdrawal. The U.N.'s humanitarian-aid operations were a shambles, and the Bosnian enclaves of Srebrenica and Zepa had fallen to the Serbs, who massacred thousands of the inhabitants and were routinely using U.N. soldiers as hostages. The British were fed up, and it seemed likely that the French and the Dutch soon would be. A humiliation on that order not only would have put an end to any hope of settling the Bosnian conflict but also would have exacerbated the tensions among the NATO countries which the crisis had already exposed.

Mr. Clinton acted as he did largely because the alternative to his gamble—an endless war in Europe—was worse. That does not make his decision any less statesmanlike or his task any easier. He has probably never before made a decision so fraught with political peril. The stakes are enormous—for the peace of Europe and, if American soldiers start coming home dead, for his own re-election hopes. The United States has become the guarantor of a peace whose terms are so difficult to explain that even their main author, Mr. Holbrooke, has acknowledged that they are contradictory. In any case, most Americans are not exactly eager to put their countrymen's lives at risk in order to sort out the disputes of faraway peoples.

The President, in his televised address last week, finally talked about America's moral responsibilities, about the peace of Europe, and about the need to define the national interest in broad terms. All this represents a radical departure from his approach of the preceding two and a half years. Had his Administration not kept its distance from the Bosnian tragedy for so long, his words might have changed more minds. There was little in those parts of the speech dealing with the moral and geopolitical importance of Bosnia that could not have been said three years ago. (Indeed, it *was* said three years ago, and by Mr. Clinton, when he was a candidate.) If Bosnia is a moral interest in 1995, surely it was a moral interest in 1992 and 1993, when the killing was much worse; if an American duty to help maintain the security of Europe is vital today, then, by the same logic, it was vital earlier, too. In private, of course, policymakers within the Clinton Administration rue this history of American inattentiveness. They must now overcome its result: the public's reluctance to support an American troop deployment.

On a deeper level, the difficulty of garnering such support points to the degree that any consensus on America's role in the world has broken down. Many Americans may still take pride in being citizens of the last remaining superpower. But, faced with the need to act in Bosnia—a classic example of a crisis that is either settled by great-power intervention or allowed to take its catastrophic course—even those Americans are not so sure they want the risks and responsibilities that go with great-power status. The fact that prominent internationalists, whether of President Clinton's stripe or Senator Dole's, defend their convictions only intermittently and cautiously is both a cause and a symptom of that unsureness.

The debate over Bosnia reveals the way in which many Americans now understand—or, rather, misunderstand—what distinguishes a superpower from other powerful states. *Every* nation acts when its *vital* national interests are at stake—that is what nations are all about. But a superpower is defined by its readiness to act in some matters that do *not* imperil national survival—matters like Bosnia. Were Senator Gramm, for example, to take a principled isolationist position, and to call for a radical downsizing of the American military forces to a level commensurate with the modest needs of territorial self-defense, his opposition to involvement in Bosnia would make sense. But the senator does not favor a slashed defense budget. In reality, what he and those who share his views want is for the United States to be a kind of Superpower Lite, with all the privileges of superpower status but none of its burdens.

President Clinton is not without responsibility for having helped foster the mood he must now overcome in order to persuade the public and Congress that sending troops to Bosnia is essential. But neither are the rest of us. Ambivalence about American power unites right and left these days. To transform a mindset built of such developments as the end of the Cold War, the growth of racial discord, and the decline of public confidence in the political process is a task that cannot be accomplished by one Presidential speech, however eloquent. But the speech—and the commitment it represents—could be a start.

—DAVID RIEFF

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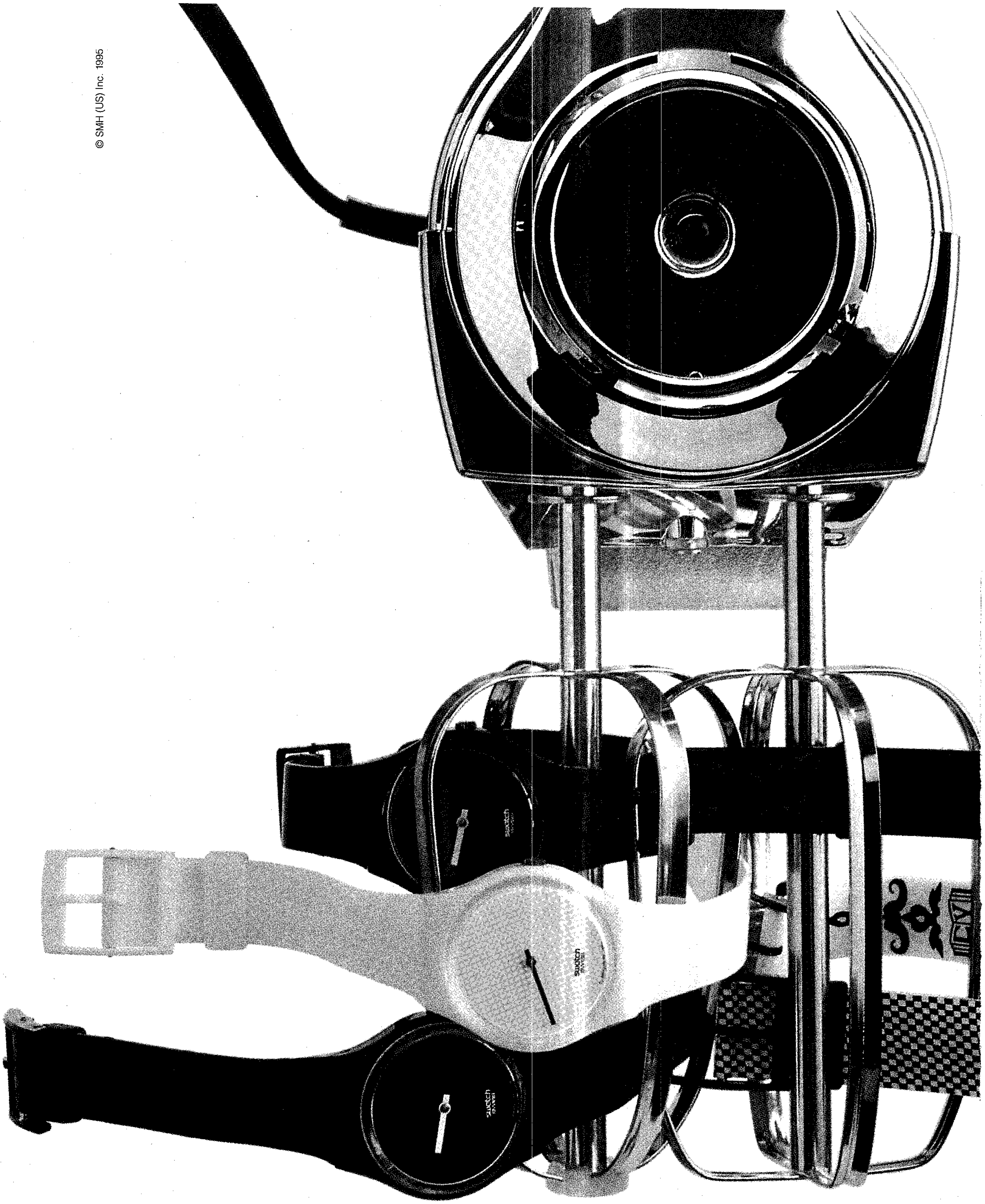
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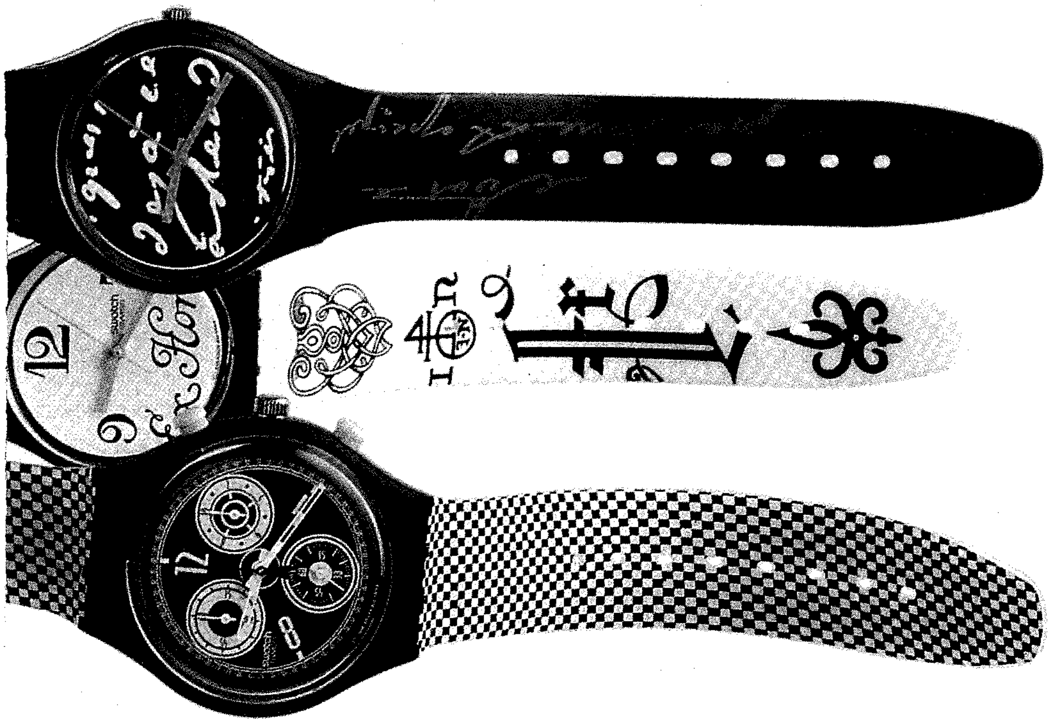

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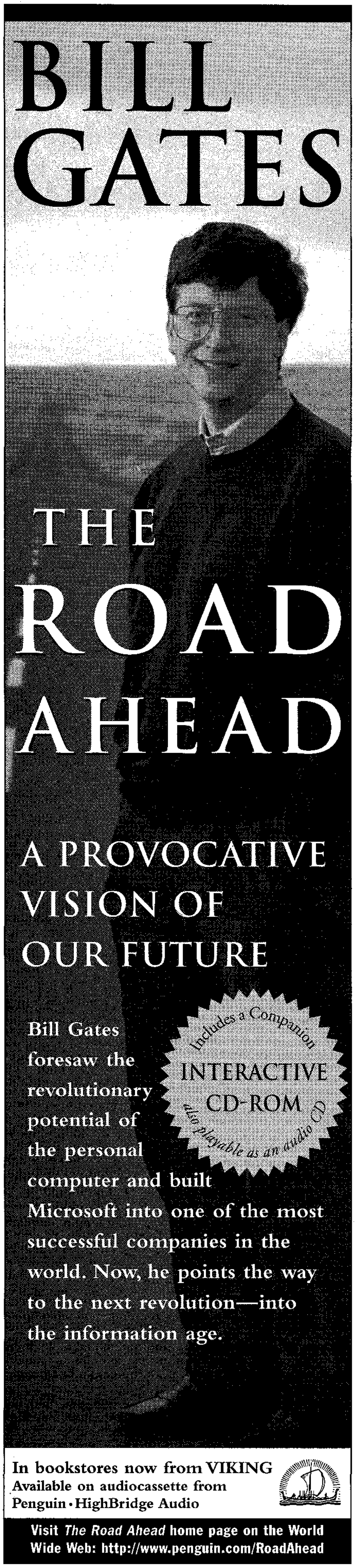

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# IN THE MAIL

## WHO'S ON TOP?

For some reason, I read all the way through the article on the porn industry ("The Money Shot," by Susan Faludi, October 30th). I suppose I was looking for some significance in the lives of the male "actors" who were discussed. I kept trying, without success, to empathize with the implied tragedies of their lives. There seem to be two reasons for their anguish: that only a few of the many male aspirants attain fame and fortune, and that the female stars hold the power (in contrast to how they are dominated in the films). This bizarre narrative of disillusionment and death leaves me with no more pity for its victims than for terrorists who are finally slaughtered in another terrorist's vicious attack. The porn players' lives are insignificant in both number and social content, and writing about them, printing the story, and even reading it is a waste of time. It may be a true slice of life, but it's not one worth noting.

D. WILSON
Stockton Springs, Maine

Glad as I was to see an article in *The New Yorker* about male porn stars, being a male porn star myself, I was disappointed by Faludi's treatment of her subject. She paints a vivid picture of personalities, but, because she doesn't report all the reasons for her subjects' actions, what we see is a detailed map of her own prejudices. For instance, Cal Jammer, the actor who committed suicide, told me before I knew him well enough to say hello to him, "Since I was addicted to coke, I have no control of my emotions." It is easy to use the bombed-out and the out-to-lunch, because they are colorful and enable you to draw broad conclusions. But if you believe Faludi's highbrow intellectual musings that men may be killing themselves because of losing to women in the marketplace of a lowbrow art form, then you'll trust me when I say my stick-figure doodles are Rembrandts.

FARRELL TIMLAKE
San Diego, Calif.

By romanticizing the plight of heterosexual porn actors and lionizing the performance of the "slam-fuck" artist T.T. Boy, Susan Faludi creates strange new heroes in a year that already seems overrun with strange heroes. But it is ironic that, in building a case that women have power in the porn industry, Faludi focusses on the higher salaries of porn actresses. In fact, women in pornography commonly have unprotected vaginal and anal intercourse with their co-stars, but Faludi notes this only once—when a porn actor complains because a woman wanted him to use a condom. Female pornographic performers may have certain advantages over their male counterparts, but to view them as empowered or privileged is ridiculous. That Faludi, the author of "Backlash," should miss this point is the strangest thing about the article.

ALAN BERNSTEIN
Los Angeles, Calif.

Susan Faludi has triumphed once again in demonstrating how both sexes are harmed by rigid sexual stereotypes. In "The Money Shot," she meticulously records the dilemmas posed by a society that requires men to do and women to be. How interesting that in our era of late capitalism the pornography industry has flipped the coin in terms of the economics of gender. And how ironic that the one muscle that men "can't flex" is sabotaging their efforts to come out on top.

MEG MOTT
Putney, Vt.

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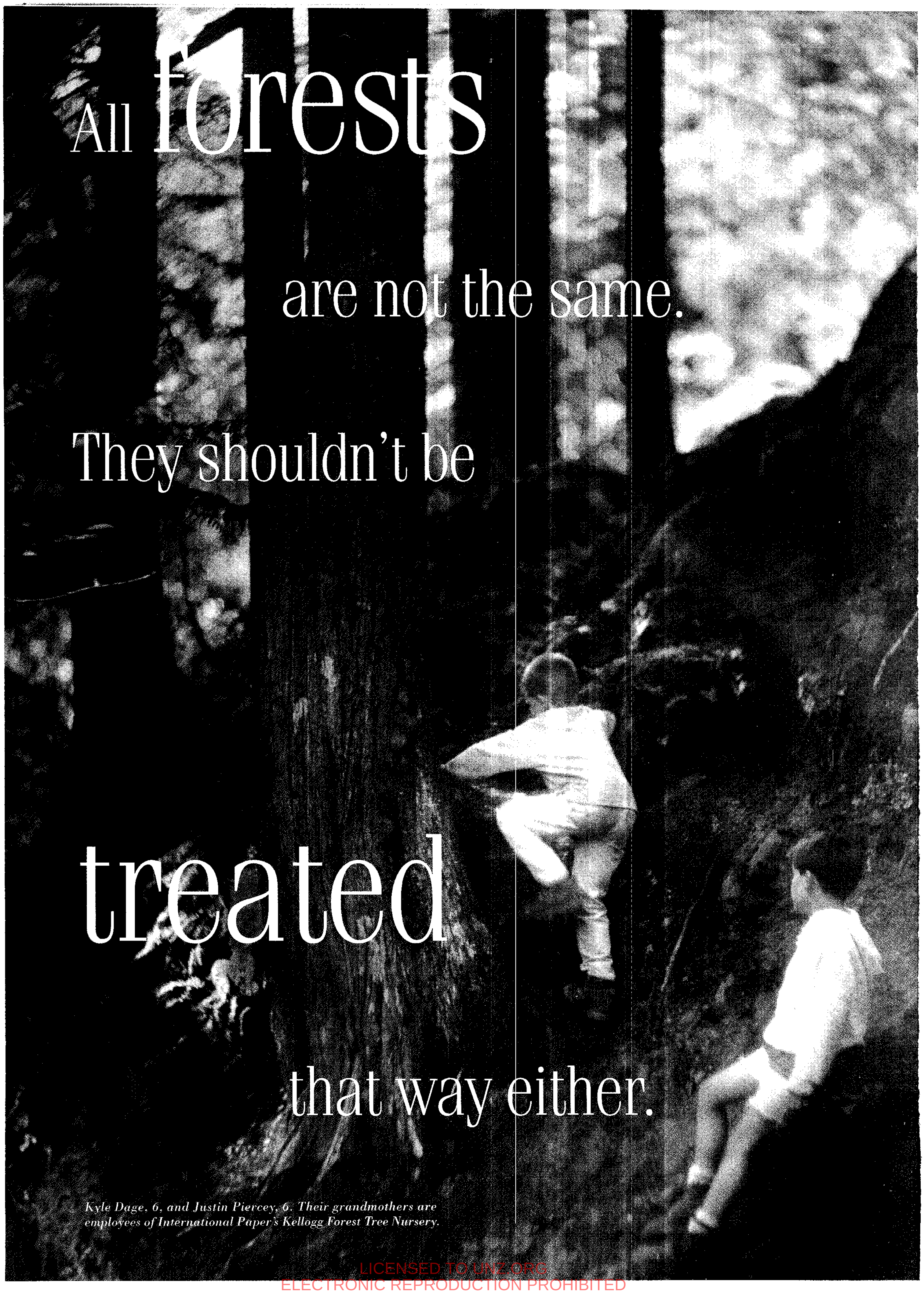
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*Kyle Dage, 6, and Justin Piercey, 6. Their grandmothers are employees of International Paper's Kellogg Forest Tree Nursery.*

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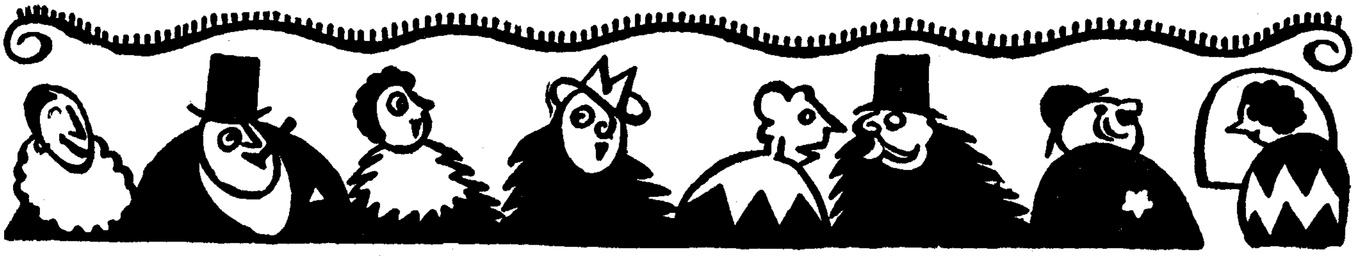

# GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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## THE HOLIDAYS

*There are, of course, far too many things that must be done before the holidays. As soon as we realized this, we began compiling a list of things to do instead. Here are a few options to help fill your calendar into the new year.*

### SEASONAL SPECIALTIES

**"The Radio City Christmas Spectacular"**—Santa is front man for the Rockettes in a holiday musical stuffed with dancing teddy bears, wooden soldiers, and a crèche complete with live bleating donkeys and camels. (Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. Through Jan. 7.)

**"A Christmas Carol"**—Terrence Mann and Ben Vereen lead a cast of ninety. The score is by Alan Menken. (Madison Square Garden. 465-6741. Through Dec. 31.) . . . ¶ Dickens' original manuscript—which he dashed off in six weeks—is on display at the Morgan Library. (29 E. 36th St. 685-0008, ext. 347. Through Jan. 7.)

**"The Eight: Reindeer Monologues"**—The Adobe Theatre Company brings Jeff Goode's twisted holiday comedy back for a second season. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 560-7387. Closes Dec. 16.)

**Menorah Lighting**—On Dec. 17, in observance of Hanukkah, one flame will glow atop the thirty-two-foot menorah at Fifth Ave. and 59th St. Another light will be added every evening until Dec. 24, when, starting at 5:30, there will be live music, singing, and a chance to dance. (For more information, call 1-718 778-6000.)

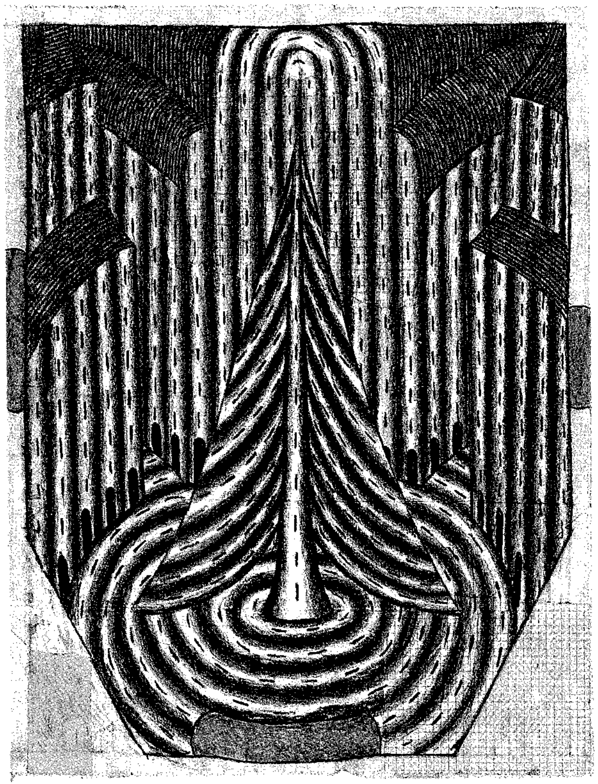
**"Jingle Belles"**—The Lady Bunny, Varla Jean Merman, and Sherry Vine don their gay apparel for a new drag revue. (Westbeth Theatre, 151 Bank Street. 741-0391. Dec. 15-17 and Dec. 22-23 at 9.)

**Children's Fare**—The Poppy Seed Players celebrate Hanukkah with "Hannah the Joyful" and "Judy and the Maccabees," a pair of one-act musicals. (Elaine Kaufman Cultural Center, 129 W. 67th St. 362-8060. Dec. 17 at 11 A.M.) . . . ¶ A young spaceman kidnaps the man in red on Christmas Eve in "A Captured Claus," a musical by the late Joe Raposo (a co-creator of "Sesame Street") and his son Nick. Directed by Michael John Murnin. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 874-2990. Wednesdays through Sundays, through Dec. 31.)

**"Clement Clarke Moore of Chelsea and 'A Visit from St. Nicholas'"**—The handwritten original, from 1822, is on display along with various illustrated editions and other materials relating to the author and his environs. (New-York Historical Society, 2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. 873-3400. Through Feb. 4.)

**"Brother Marx Nativity"**—The Vermont-based Bread and Puppet Theatre brings its version of the Christmas story—an adaptation by Peter Schumann, based on the Gospels of Luke and Matthew and on Karl Marx's "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts"—to town for the holiday season. Through Dec. 17. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 254-1109.)

**Kwanzaa**—A traditional African marketplace, with music and dance performances, rises at the American Museum of Natural History in celebration of Kwanzaa, which means, in Swahili, "the first fruits of the harvest." (Central Park W. at 79th St. 769-5100. Dec. 29, starting at noon.) . . . ¶ On Dec. 27, at 6, S.O.B.'s serves a traditional African harvest buffet, after which the Nigerian percussionist Baba Olatunji leads the Drums of Passion. (204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. 243-4940.)



PHILIPPE WEISBECKER

**Trees**—If you missed the tree lighting at Rockefeller Center, there's still time to join Ruthie, Big Bird, and the Cookie Monster (of "Sesame Street") for the lighting of Lincoln Center's forty-foot blue spruce. (Fountain Plaza. Dec. 11 at 6:30.) . . . ¶ The St. Cecilia Chorus turns itself into a singing Christmas tree at the South Street Seaport. (East River at Fulton St. Thursdays and Fridays at 6:30 and 7:30, Saturdays and Sundays at 3 and 4. Through Jan. 1.) . . . ¶ A twenty-foot artificial blue spruce decorated with eighteenth-century Neapolitan angels and cherubs shares the floor with crèche figures from the same set at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. There is a lighting ceremony on Fridays and Saturdays at 7. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. Through Jan. 7.) . . . ¶ Origami arachnids and mandrills, meteorites and sequoias adorn the fourteen-foot tree at the American Museum of Natural History, while a large number of origami dinosaurs have taken up residence beneath it. (Central Park W. at 79th St. Through Jan. 9.) . . . ¶ And don't forget Rockefeller Center's centerpiece: this year it's a seventy-five-foot Norway spruce.

**"Star of Christmas"**—The Three Wise Men. Bethlehem. Who knew? This celestial show gives the views of historians, theologians, linguists, and astronomers on the ancient story. (Hayden Planetarium, Central Park W. at 79th St. 769-5100. Through Jan. 1.)

**Bronx Treats**—The New York Botanical Garden celebrates the season with an outdoor exhibit of a large-gauge model railway and an indoor display of miniature trees decorated to illustrate carols. On weekends in December and for the week between Christmas and New Year's Day, there will also be a puppet-show version of "The Little Engine That Could" and visits from Thomas the Tank Engine. (Bronx Park. 1-718 817-8700. Exhibits on display through Jan. 7.)

### MUSIC AND DANCE

**"The Nutcracker"**—The New York City Ballet returns with its holiday heartwarmer. The performance schedule caters to early bedtimes, so read those tickets carefully. (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Dec. 6-7 and Dec. 12 at 6, Dec. 8 at 8, Dec. 9 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 10 at 1 and 5. Through Dec. 31.) . . . ¶ For those with brief attention spans, the New York Theatre Ballet presents a "Nutcracker" condensed to about an hour. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. Dec. 23-24 and Dec. 29-31 at 1 and 3:30.)

**"The Harlem Nutcracker"**—Choreographer Donald Byrd's work-in-progress adaptation, to music that includes Duke Ellington's arrangements of Tchaikovsky. (Davis Hall, Convent Ave. at 134th St. 650-7100. Dec. 16 at 7:30 and Dec. 17 at 3.)

**Handel's "Messiah"**—There's one (or more) for every taste; here are a couple that strike our fancy. Dec. 12 and Dec. 14 at 7:30: The St. Thomas Choir of Men and Boys, soloists, and the Concert Royal orchestra. (St. Thomas Church, Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. 757-7013.) . . . ¶ Dec. 17 at 3: The Choir and Orchestra of Trinity Church, where the oratorio received its American première, in 1770 (though the building has been reconstructed twice since then). (Broadway at Wall St. 602-0873.)

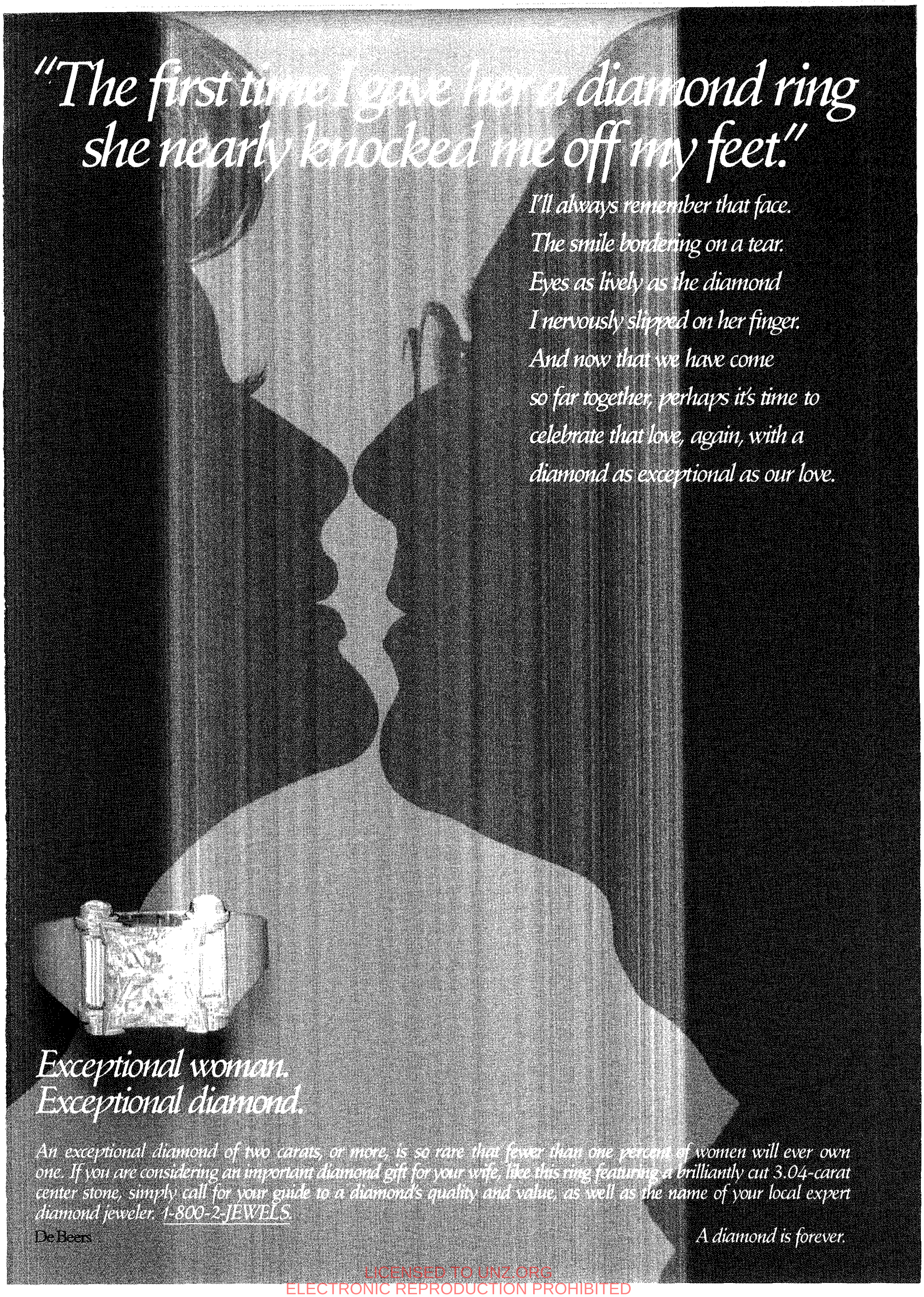
**Anonymous 4**—The female foursome offers a live version of its best-selling Harmonia Mundi CD "On Yoolis Night," featuring nativity carols and motets from the Middle Ages. (St. Michael's Church, Amsterdam Ave. at 99th St. 678-5432. Dec. 15 at 8.)

**Orchestra of St. Luke's**—Two years ago, the orchestra restored Berlioz's oratorio "L'Enfance du Christ" to New York's concert scene, and they intend to revive it biannually; thanks are due. This year, Charles Mackerras directs, with the Canticum Novum Festival Singers. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Dec. 16 at 8.)

**Pomerium and the Baltimore Consort**—Two early-music groups share the bill on a Renaissance program in front of the Christmas tree in the Metropolitan Museum's Medieval Sculpture Hall. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Dec. 17 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

**New York Philharmonic**—Leonard Slatkin leads a "New Year's Eve Eve" concert of international holiday favorites. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Dec. 30 at 8.)

**Grab Bags**—These recommendable concerts mix solid classics with lighter holiday fare. Dec. 12 at 8: Joseph Flummerfelt directs the Westminster Choir and Orchestra in a concert that



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includes Bach's Cantata No. 140. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800.) . . . ¶ Dec. 14 at 8: Kyler Brown leads the Virgin Consort in a program of sacred works which includes Arvo Pärt's Magnificat and a Mass by Victoria. (Church of St. Mary the Virgin, 145 W. 46th St. 921-2939.) . . . ¶ Dec. 23 at 3 and 8: The New York Philharmonic's brass section and the Canadian Brass join for a wide-ranging program. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030.)

**Annual Standards**—The New York Pops, joined this year by the King's Singers. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Dec. 8-9 at 8.) . . . ¶ Menotti's one-act opera "Amahl and the Night Visitors," performed by the Little Orchestra Society. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Dec. 9 at 11 A.M., 1, and 3.) . . . ¶ The Vienna Choir Boys. (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 10 at 7:30.) . . . ¶ The Aulos Ensemble, with various guests, presenting Baroque works and traditional carols. (Medieval Sculpture Hall, Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Dec. 20-21 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

# THE THEATRE

## OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

*(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)*

**Dick Gregory Live**—The comic makes his Off Broadway début. Presented by the Negro Ensemble Company. In previews. (Samuel Beckett, 412 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)

**The Duchess of Malfi**—The British troupe Cheek by Jowl's new staging of Webster's Jacobean tragedy. Opens Dec. 6 at 8 and continues through Dec. 16. (Majestic, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 1-718 636-4100.)

**The Idiot Variations**—Rinde Eckert, accompanying himself on a wide array of musical instruments, performs his latest solo piece, an exploration of foolishness in its many human forms. Opens Dec. 8 at 10:30 and continues through Dec. 16. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

**Oblivion Postponed**—A comedy-drama about a straight Ohio couple and a gay New York couple who meet while vacationing in Rome. Written by Ron Nyswaner. Preview on Dec. 6. Opens Dec. 7 at 7. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 873-6103.)

**The Revenger's Tragedy**—This production of Tourneur's 1607 Senecan drama has been set in the future by the Independent Theatre Company. Opens Dec. 6. (House of Candles Theatre, 99 Stanton St. 353-3088.)

**Rodgers & Hart Rediscovered**—The second offering in new series devoted to the music and lyrics of Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart is a concert staging of "America's Sweetheart." Dec. 10-11 at 8. (Theatre Off Park, 224 Waverly Pl., at 11th St. 307-4100.)

**Valley Song**—The South African playwright Athol Fugard appears with Lisa Gay Hamilton in his new drama, about the effects of political change in his homeland. In previews through Dec. 10. Opens Dec. 12 at 7:30. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

**Wasp and Other Plays**—Four new one-acts by Steve Martin. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

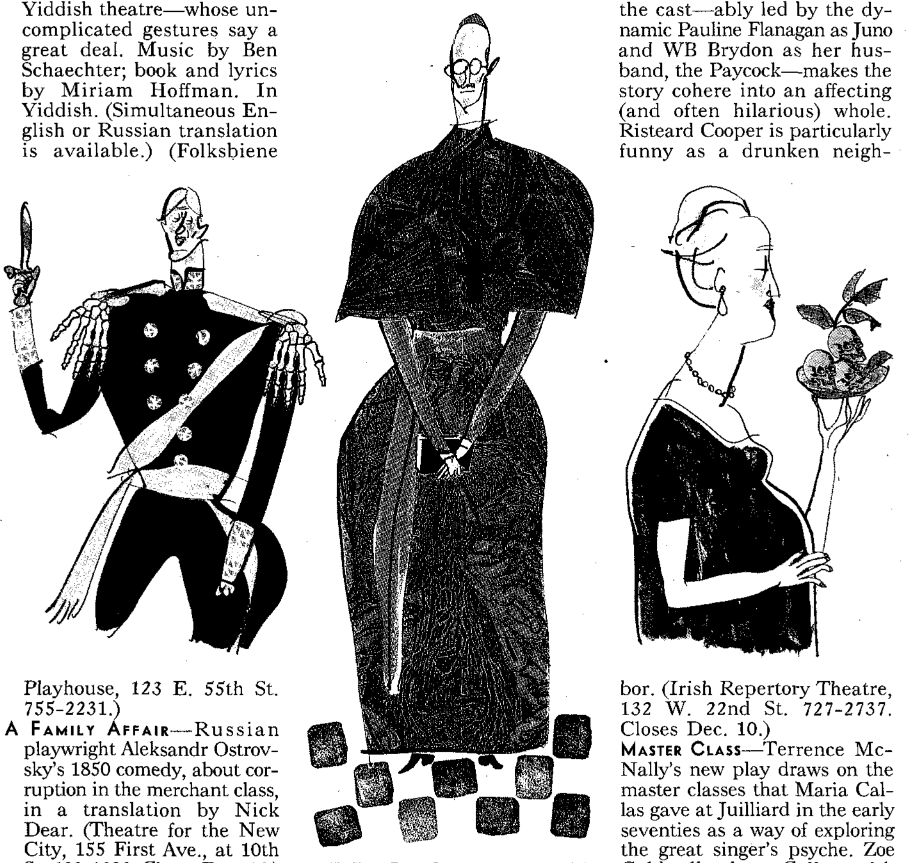
## OPENED RECENTLY

**Black Ink**—Four one-act plays by Beverly Smith-Dawson, Lynn Martin, Ed DuRanté, and Kia Corthron—members of Playwrights Horizons' African-American Playwrights Unit. (416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Dec. 10.)

**Bring In 'da Noise/Bring In 'da Funk**—In attempting not only to return tap to black culture but to give black culture back to tap, director George C. Wolfe and dancer-choreographer Savion Glover have made a drama that, with heroic energy, charts the evolution of the African-African beat from its rural Southern beginnings to its Northern urbanization and on to its present hip-hop incarnation in the choreography of Glover and his homeboy hoofers. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/4/95.) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

**Dangerous Corner**—As directed by David Mamet, the characters in J. B. Priestley's 1932 mystery—a meditation on the fragile interconnectedness of people's lives—don't seem connected at all. The biggest mystery is why everyone onstage seems so strangely wooden. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

**Double Identity**—This Yiddish musical comedy (based on a Sholom Aleichem story), about two Russian students, Jew and Gentile, who agree to switch places for a year, is like a visit to the Old Country. The melodies are simple, the dialogue is straightforward, and the message is clear: it's hard to be a Jew. The actors perform with conviction, especially Zypora Spaisman—the matriarch of Yiddish theatre—whose uncomplicated gestures say a great deal. Music by Ben Schaechter; book and lyrics by Miriam Hoffman. In Yiddish. (Simultaneous English or Russian translation is available.) (Folksbiene Playhouse, 123 E. 55th St. 755-2231.)



*"The Duchess of Malfi."*

**A Family Affair**—Russian playwright Aleksandr Ostrovsky's 1850 comedy, about corruption in the merchant class, in a translation by Nick Dear. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 633-1292. Closes Dec. 16.)

**The Food Chain**—Although the situations in Nicky Silver's new play are familiar and sitcom-ish, the writing is tangy and memorably funny, and the actors give smart, wonderfully fresh performances. Robert Falls directed. (9/11/95) (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

**Fool Moon**—Clowning and music with Bill Irwin, David Shiner, and North Carolina's Red Clay Ramblers. (Ambassador, 215 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

**Golden Boy**—Joanne Woodward's staging of Clifford Odets' 1937 drama, about a young violinist (Greg Naughton) who gives up music for the power and money of the boxing ring, starts out slowly and then surprises you with one powerful punch after another. Odets' struggling characters have big hearts, and almost everyone in the ensemble gets the opportunity to shine—especially Angie Phillips, as Lorna, the tired girl with a past who falls for the hero. (45th Street Theatre, 354 W. 45th St. 279-4200. Closes Dec. 16.)

**Hello, Dolly!**—There is much to like about Carol Channing—the comic timing, the speaking voice, the star quality—but the evening is one long curtain call, and a bit of a strain on the nerves, as she attempts to prove over and over that she can do it all as well in her seventies as she could in her forties. Lee Roy Reams directed. (11/27/95) (Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

**Holiday**—Tony Goldwyn and Laura Linney star in a revival of Philip Barry's 1928 comedy, directed by David Warren. (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

**Jam On the Groove**—A hip-hop musical by GhettOriginal. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000.)

**June and Jean in Concert**—A moving play by Adrienne Kennedy that is as much an evocation of time and place (nineteen-forties Cleveland) as it is a coming-of-age story. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes Dec. 10.)

**Juno and the Paycock**—Sean O'Casey takes on everything from the Troubles to unwed motherhood in his 1924 tale of the downfall of a working-class Dublin family. Under Charlotte Moore's steady direction, the cast—ably led by the dynamic Pauline Flanagan as Juno and WB Brydon as her husband, the Paycock—makes the story cohere into an affecting (and often hilarious) whole. Risteard Cooper is particularly funny as a drunken neighbor. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Dec. 10.)

**Master Class**—Terrence McNally's new play draws on the master classes that Maria Callas gave at Juilliard in the early seventies as a way of exploring the great singer's psyche. Zoe Caldwell plays Callas with steely, divaesque conviction, but the role is merely the sum of all the clichés that have been in circulation for years; the Callas who was a consummate professional and an inspired teacher—and a human being—is missing. Leonard Foglia directed. (11/27/95) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

**The Misanthrope**—Falstaff Presents offers a new translation of Molière's comedy, set in nineteen-twenties Paris. (CSC, 136 E. 13th St. 803-5443. Closes Dec. 23.)

**Mrs. Klein**—Two London psychoanalysts—the famous Melanie Klein (Uta Hagen) and her less renowned daughter, Melitta (Laila Robins)—face off in a murderous argument and proceed to browbeat each other with theory. Nicholas Wright's smart though schematic drama dissects Klein's tempestuous relationship with her high-strung daughter and shrewdly explores the autobiographical parallels to Klein's seminal thesis on the effects of parental neglect. Robins is excellent; Hagen is brilliant. (11/20/95) (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

**Molière's Shorts**—This Actors Shakespeare Company production, an adaptation of four of the playwright's comedies, throws vaudeville routines, Marx Brothers jokes, and other elements into the mix. (Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 255-6895. Closes Dec. 23.)

**Moon Over Buffalo**—Ken Ludwig's backstage farce is as forgettable as Carol Burnett (whose last Broadway appearance was thirty years ago) is not: our reigning red-headed queen of comedy is delightful to behold. Tom Moore

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directed. (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

**Moonlight**—In Harold Pinter's first full-length play since 1978, Jason Robards is both avuncular and acrimonious in the role of a dying man whose sons refuse to visit him. Blythe Danner, who plays his wife, conveys silent torment through her superbly expressive eyes. The director, Karel Reisz, has excavated the suffering beneath their sarcasm and perfectly captured Pinter's sense of dread. (11/6/95) (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400. Closes Dec. 17.)

**Mud**—Maria Irene Fornes's 1983 drama about three people on the skids, with Joseph Goodrich, John O'Keefe, and Wendy vanden Heuvel. Produced by the Other Theatre. (Judith Anderson Theatre, 422 W. 42nd St. 642-5498. Closes Dec. 17.)

**Murder at Minsing Manor: A Nancy-Boys Mystery**—Another broad, antic romp by the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, in which an aging temptress (Everett Quinton) may or may not have dispatched her sugar daddy. The satire of church, state, and the Hardy Boys is right on target. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 239-6200.)

**New England**—In Richard Nelson's latest play, seven Britons and a Frenchwoman living in America gather in Connecticut to mourn a death but end up complaining—about the illiteracy of American movies, the low standards of American publishing, and the ineptitude of American actors (a failing this crack cast belies). The crowning irony is that they've all chosen to live here. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes Dec. 22.)

**Nixon's Nixon**—This play by Russell Lees, set in the White House during a secret meeting on the night before the President's resignation, has reopened. (MCC, 120 W. 28th St. 727-7765. Closes Dec. 24.)

**Northeast Local**—Tom Donaghy's drama, which begins in the early sixties and ends in the early nineties, stars Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio and Anthony LaPaglia as a working-class couple who come together and then break apart. Both the writing and the performances make for an uneven evening, but LaPaglia gives the play an authenticity it wouldn't otherwise have. Gerald Gutierrez directed. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

**Picasso at the Lapin Agile**—Steve Martin's comedy, set in a Paris bar in 1904, features Einstein (Mark Nelson) and Picasso (Tim Hopper) sittin' around talkin' about how they're going to change the world, and contains a satisfying amount of Martin's coolly absurdist humor—but also a certain sourness. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

**Por' Knockers**—A group of political activists inadvertently kill several children when they blow up a government building, in Lynn Nottage's latest play. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3874. Closes Dec. 10.)

**Quills**—A Grand Guignol take on the Marquis de Sade's final imprisonment, at the Charenton asylum outside Paris, complete with wildly abandoned performances, spooky lighting, a surreal set, rich costumes, and macabre humor. This de Sade (Rocco Sisto) is a childlike character who has once again been sent to his room—to no avail: he finds a way to record his lewd and blasphemous tales (which he reads to the audience) no matter how many of his privileges, beginning with his quills and paper, are taken away. Doug Wright's drama points out the slippery nature of morality a couple of times too many, perhaps, but it's thought-provoking, frightening, often very funny, and full of delicious dirty talk. The cast is strong, and Lola Pashalinski is hilarious as the Marquise. Directed by Howard Shalwitz. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475. Closes Dec. 22.)

**Racing Demon**—A group of Anglican clergymen confronts the problems of operating a parish in inner-city London, in a play by David Hare. Directed by Richard Eyre. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

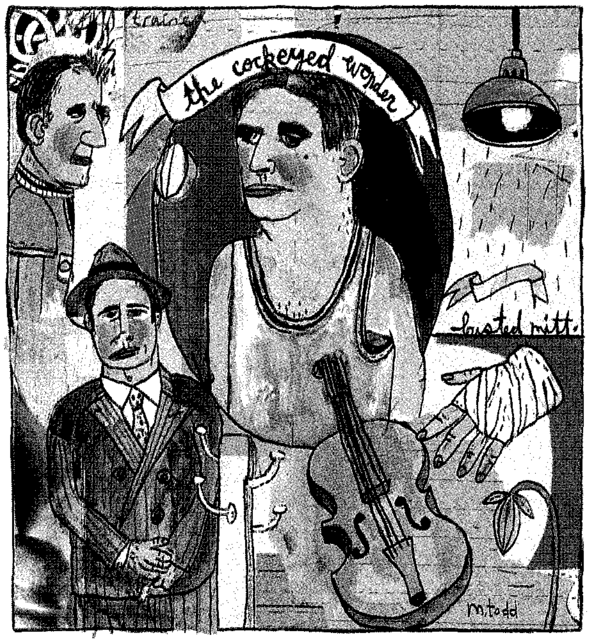
**The School for Scandal**—The calumny is heaped as high as the wigs in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's 1777 comedy of manners, but this National Actors Theatre production doesn't provide the acid or the snap it takes to bring the coterie of slanderers to life. Director Gerald Freedman's curriculum—long on period detail but short on keen characterization—favors mannerism over delivery. Tom Hewitt stands out in the role of Charles Surface. Starring Simon Jones and Tony Randall. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6280.)

**Shimmer**—A man recounts his escape at age fifteen from a juvenile-detention center, in John O'Keefe's one-man play. With Jud Meyers. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Dec. 17.)

**Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine**—Norma Jean Darden—model, caterer, actress—shares recipes and talks about her family in this reprise of her play, which was inspired by the cookbook she wrote with her sister, Carole Darden. (American Place Theatre, 111 W. 46th St. 840-3074. Closes Dec. 10.)

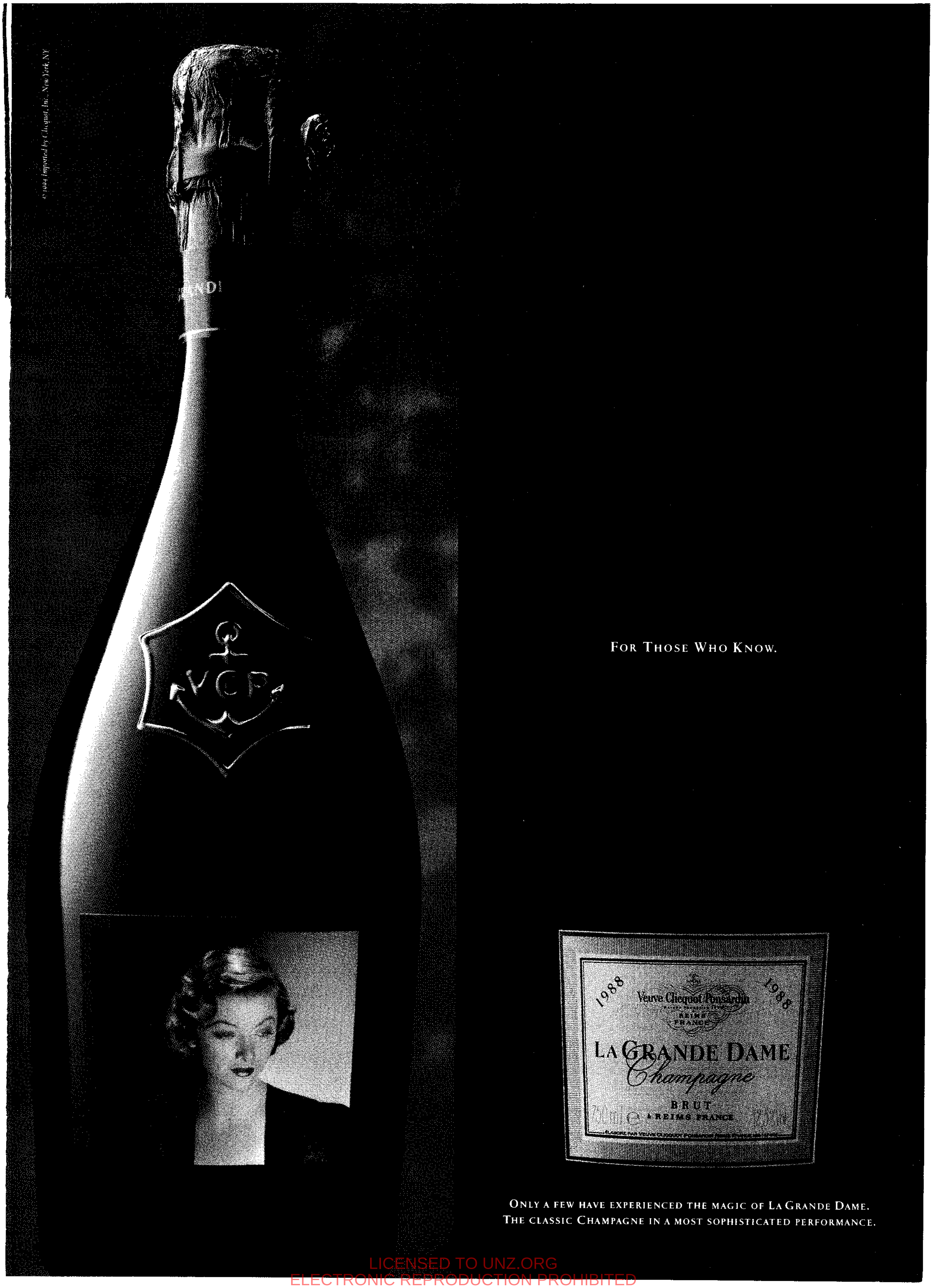
**Swinging on a Star**—A stylish, heartfelt showcase for Johnny Burke's songs, which include "Pennies from Heaven" and "Misty." The cast and band are nearly perfect; the show was written and directed by Michael Leeds and choreographed, brilliantly, by Kathleen Marshall. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

**The Tempest**—George C. Wolfe's acrylic version, a street-theatre production brought indoors (it had its début last summer at the Public's Delacorte Theatre, in Central Park). It's billed as "a New World vision," but it consists largely of Old World avant-garde theatrics. The pyrotechnics (drummers, Indonesian shadow puppets, Brazilian stilt walkers) and the Prospero (Patrick Stewart) excite the audience without illuminating it; you leave remembering the sounds and the spectacle



*Joe Grifasi, Bruce MacVittie, and Greg Naughton, in "Golden Boy."*

MARK TODD

© 1994 Imported by Clicquot, Inc., New York, NY
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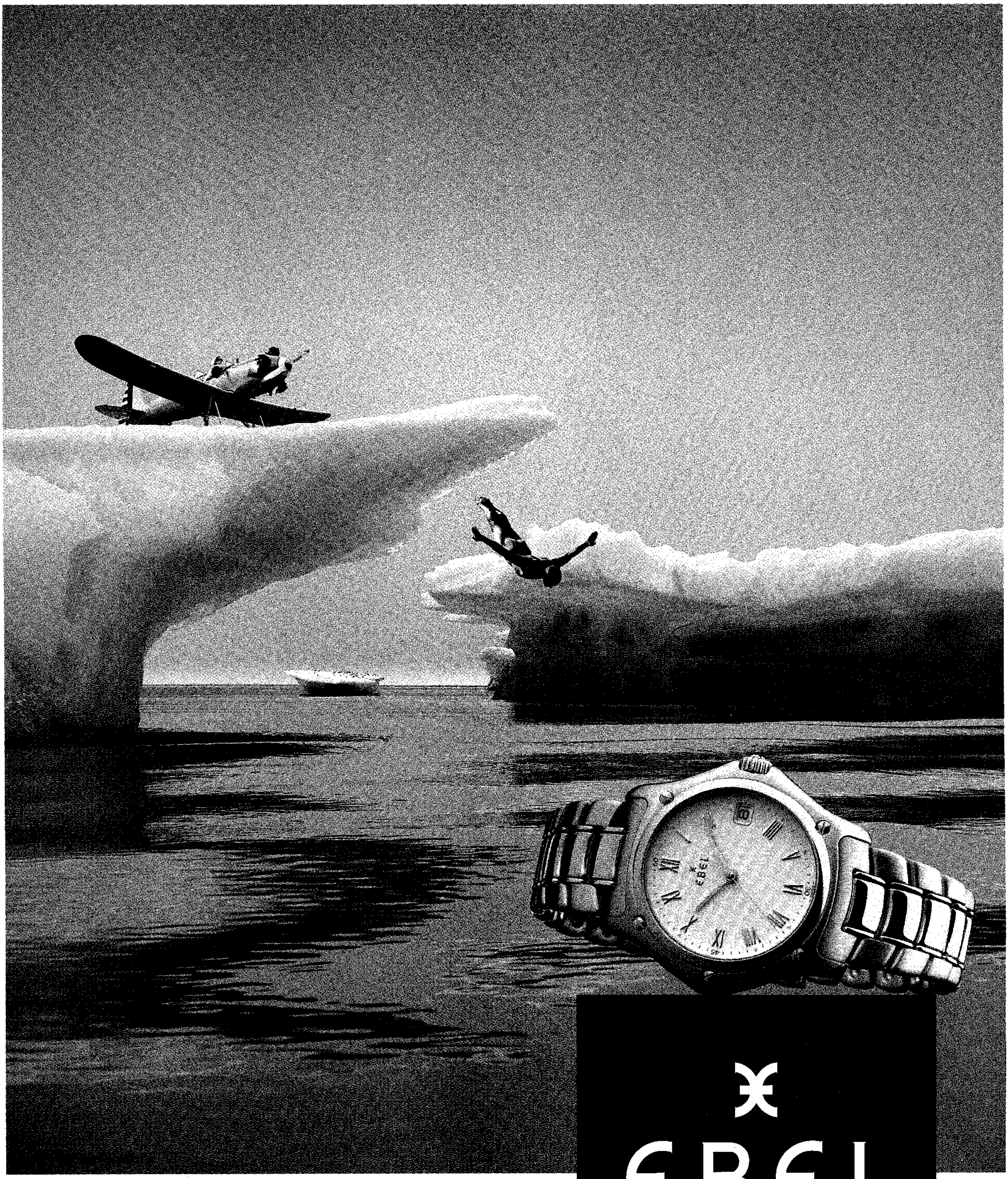

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but not one vivid line of the poetry. (12/4/95) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

**Victor/Victoria**—Julie Andrews has returned to Broadway to star, with Tony Roberts and Michael Nouri, in a theatrical version of the 1982 movie. But trying to deliver with this show's generic score (by Henry Mancini) and patchwork book (by Blake Edwards, who also directed) is like trying to start a fire with sodden wood: she creates smoke but no heat. The leggy Rachel York, as a blond bimbo, at least enjoys herself—and the audience enjoys her, too. (11/20/95) (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

**The Warm-Up**—Sammy Shore's one-man comedy about his career as the opening act for such stars as Elvis Presley and Frank Sinatra. (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 633-9797.)

**Zombies from the Beyond**—The many songs in James Valcq's musical sendup of fifties science-fiction movies are funny, and the cast—particularly Claire Morkin, as the competent ingénue who has to save the world's men from the lascivious Zombettes—is cartoonish perfection. (Players, 115 Macdougal St. 254-5076.)

### LONG RUNS

**after-play:** Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200. . . . **beauty and the beast:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **blue man group/tubes:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **cats:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **crazy for you:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **death defying acts:** Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200. . . . **the fantasticks:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **grandma sylvia's funeral:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **grease!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **having our say:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **the heiress:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200. . . . **how to succeed in business without really trying:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **les misérables:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **miss saigon:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **party:** Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-4321. . . . **perfect crime:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **the phantom of the opera:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **rob becker's defending the caveman:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100. . . . **show boat:** Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100. . . . **smokey joe's café:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **stomp:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **sunset boulevard:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007. . . . **swingtime canteen:** Blue Angel, 321 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **sylvia:** John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **tony n' tina's wedding:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200.

## DANCE

*(See Holiday listings as well.)*

**Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre**—Dec. 6 at 8: "Night Creature," "Scissors Paper Stone," "Shelter," and "Memoria." . . . ¶ Dec. 7 at 7: "Riverside" and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 8 at 8: "Blues Suite," "Fandango," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 9 at 2: "Night Creature," "Scissors Paper Stone," "Fandango," and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 9 at 8: "Riverside" and "Carmina Burana." . . . ¶ Dec. 10 at 3: "Riverside," "Shelter," and "The Winter in Lisbon." . . . ¶ Dec. 10 at 7:30: "Carmina Burana" and "Revelations." . . . ¶ Dec. 12 at 7: For a benefit gala, the company performs "Tribute to Masazumi Chaya." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Through Dec. 31.)

**Ballet Hispanico**—The Manhattan-based company closes its season with works by Ramón Oller, Susan Marshall, George Faison, Alberto Alonso, and Graciela Daniele. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Dec. 6-8 at 8, Dec. 9 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 10 at 2 and 7:30.)

**Mark Morris Dance Group**—Dec. 9 at 7 and Dec. 12 at 8: "A Spell," "The Office," "Bedtime," "Somebody's Coming to See Me Tonight," and "World Power." . . . ¶ Dec. 10 at 3: "Lucky Charms," "Rondo," "Jesu, Meine Freude," and "Grand Duo." (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 1-718 636-4100. Through Dec. 17.)

**Molissa Fenley**—The solo performer and choreographer appears in a three-part work, "Regions," which chronicles her experiments with movement while she recovered from a recent knee injury. Other Fenley works will be performed by Peggy Baker and Michele Pogliani. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. Dec. 6-7 at 8. For more information, call 996-1100.)

**"Ivy Grows"**—The Donna Uchizono Company presents two works that are variations on a theme: the evolution of women's roles throughout history. Katherine Maurer designed the costumes, including the dancers' tremendous orange wigs, made of feather, yarn, and straw. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Dec. 7-9 at 8 and Dec. 10 at 3.)

**"Made in Voyage"**—Choreographer Wally Cardona, of the recently disbanded Ralph Lemon Company, appears with dancers Risa Steinberg, Adriane Fang, and Kathryn Sanders. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Dec. 7-10 at 8:30.)

**"Familias"**—Installation artist Pepón Osorio and choreographer Merián Soto collaborate on a full-length work about family life in the South Bronx. (Hostos Center for the Arts & Culture, Grand Concourse at 149th St., the Bronx. 1-718 518-4455. Dec. 8-9 at 7:30 and Dec. 10 at 3. Through Dec. 17.)

**Steve Paxton and Simone Forti**—Two founders—or, as they prefer to say, instigators—of the improvisational-dance movement, and still its leading lights, appear solo in the closing performances of the Improvisation Festival/NY. A rare opportunity to see the revolutionaries who influenced (in fact, made possible) a generation of improvisatory postmodern dancers and choreographers—something like having James Joyce and Virginia Woolf on the same bill. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. Dec. 7-10 at 8.)

**"Feathers at the Flame"**—Choreographer Marlies Yearby presents a work about blood ties between African-Americans and Native Americans, based in part on stories she has gathered from her family. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 346-8510. Dec. 7 and Dec. 9 at 8 and Dec. 10 at 3. Through Dec. 17.)

## NIGHT LIFE

### CONCERTS

**Kathy Mattea**—Given that she once worked as a tour guide at the Country Music Hall of Fame, it's not surprising that this husky-voiced singer was one of the bigwigs of the new-traditionalist movement of the nineteen-eighties. Now that everything's faux traditional, she's having a tough time, even though her recent Christmas album, "Good News," brought her a much-deserved Grammy. (St Ann's Church, 157 Montague St., Brooklyn. 1-718 858-2424. Dec. 6 at 7:30.)

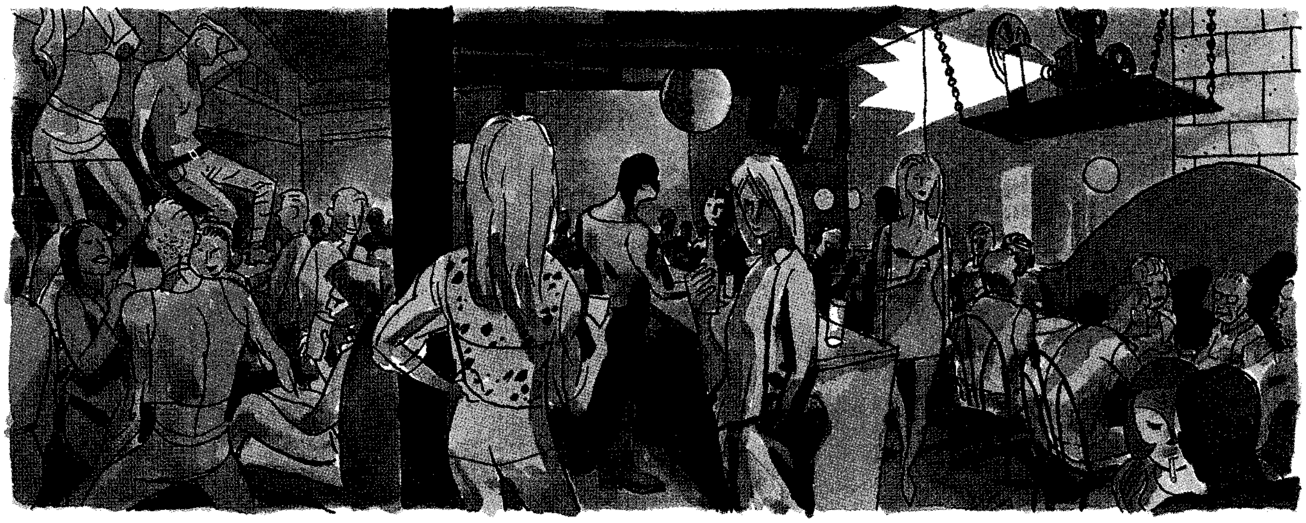
**Carnegie Hall Jazz Band**—An evening of the music of Irving Berlin and Cole Porter, conducted by John Faddis. With guest soloist Wynton Marsalis and the Roy Haynes group. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Dec. 7 at 8.)

**Roscoe Mitchell New Chamber Ensemble**—This saxophonist and composer is the most cerebral member of the Art Ensemble of Chicago; his work navigates the uncharted seas bordered by new jazz, new classical, and new sounds altogether. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 362-8719. Dec. 7 at 8.)

**Ted Nash and the Collective Big Band**—Fronting a big band will be just like old times for the skillful saxophonist Nash: he's a veteran soloist for the Vanguard Orchestra and its predecessor, the Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 995-1552. Dec. 7 at 8.)

**Billy Harper**—The tenor saxophonist and his band. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Dec. 8 at 8.)

**David Liebman Group**—Almost thirty years after John Coltrane's death, it still takes a brave man to step into the big guy's shoes. If anyone has the technique, brute strength, and sheer guts to try it, it's saxophonists Liebman and Sonny Fortune. They'll be testing themselves on one of Trane's most



DAVID MAZZUCCHELLI

*Glam a-go-go: SqueezeBox, every Friday night at Don Hill's (see Clubs).*

challenging late works, the 1966 "Meditations." (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. Dec. 9 at 8.)

**Joe Temperley and Junior Mance**—The saxophonist and the pianist. (Church of the Heavenly Rest, Fifth Ave. at 90th St. 752-1428. Dec. 10 at 5.)

**Christmas Jazz**—A benefit for the philanthropic food organization City Harvest, featuring saxophonist Tom Scott and keyboardist David Benoit. (Palladium, 126 E. 14th St. 473-7171. Dec. 12 at 6.)

**Bruce Springsteen**—His seven-city solo acoustic tour touches down for two nights—forget about tickets. A stadiumload of fans will feel left out, but those who miss the show might ask themselves if they really needed to hear the austere new songs from "The Ghost of Tom Joad" or ten or so equally melancholy numbers from "Nebraska" and "Darkness on the Edge of Town" performed live anyway. "Tom Joad" has its audacious moments, but when Springsteen strains to update Steinbeck and Woody Guthrie, he's cruising on retreads. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Dec. 12 at 8.)

### CLUBS

*(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)*

**Bottom Line,** 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Dec. 6: **PETER HIMMELMAN.** Dec. 9: A double bill of topflight acoustic music with **RORY BLOCK** and **KEB' MO'.** Though her recent albums have found her waxing ever more singer-songwriterish, there's still an earthy undercurrent to Block's unflinching music. Kevin Moore, a.k.a. Keb' Mo', is a deft blues guitarist and singer who brings to mind the young Taj Mahal.

**Brownies,** 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Dec. 7: **SIMON BONNEY.** Dec. 8: **SIX FINGER SATELLITE.**

**Chicago B.L.U.E.S.,** 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Dec. 8-9: **BOBBY RUSH** and his band.

**Continental Divide,** 25 Third Ave., at St. Marks Pl. (529-6924)—Hipsters, punks, poseurs, N.Y.U. students, the occasional skinhead—a typical East Village bar. Live music nightly.

**The Cooler,** 416 W. 14th St. (229-0785)—A lavender and stainless-steel vault deep in the heart of the meat district. Dec. 8: **SCREAMING HEADLESS TORSOS.**

**Don Hill's,** 511 Greenwich St. (219-2850)—A tidy little SoHo bar with an above-average P.A. system and topnotch local bands on the docket. Friday night is SqueezeBox, a drag queen-ridden glam-rock romp hosted by Mistress Formika which has become New York's sexiest little party. Go-go girls and boys pole dance on the overcrowded bar; the guest performers are always fun, often sleazy, and, sometimes, surprisingly, good—Sherry Vine, Deborah Harry, and members of Hole have all graced the stage. Show up late in your best metallic-blue eyeshadow.

**Duplex,** 61 Christopher St., at Seventh Ave. (255-5438)—Everyone is a star here—the pianist, the bartender, the waiters, and the audience. The fabulous **DRESSING ROOM DIVAS** entertain every Friday night.

**Fez,** 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—The fierce and uncompromising singer **TOSHI REAGON** (Dec. 8) once gave up a major record deal because the suits wanted to reshape her image; now she releases her records herself. On the brilliant "The Rejected Stone" (1994), she draws on the African-American song tradition revitalized by her mom, Bernice Johnson Reagon, a founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock. Her shows are celebratory—a shower of retro funk, urban blues, and folk—and they're all sung with evangelical fervor. To hear her is to believe. Dec. 9: The Candy Butchers. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

**Irving Plaza,** 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Dec. 9: The **FLAMING LIPS.** After years of covering such psychedelia as material from "The White Album" and anything by Syd Barrett, this Oklahoma combo is finally coming up with some trip-pop knockouts of its own. Last year, the band cast a hallucinogenic spell with the hit "She Don't Use Jelly" and, of all things, a guest spot on "90210." On the new "Clouds Taste Metallic," singer Wayne Coyne and crew continue to pose such interesting questions as "Where does outer space end?" If the music is any indication, there's no end in sight. . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday. The dancers share a passion for the Lindy Hop, a dance that involves a lot of whirling and the occasional display of underwear. Sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

**Limelight,** Sixth Ave. at 20th St. (807-7850)—The rock-and-roll church. Wednesday night is Disco 2000, a fin-de-siècle blowout.

**Ludlow Street Café,** 165 Ludlow St. (353-0536)—A modest belowstairs room that looks like a spruced-up tenement apartment. Mondays belong to **BEAT RODEO,** a straight-shooting bar band that plays a mixture of country, blues, Dylan, Byrds, Velvets, and various pop curiosities.

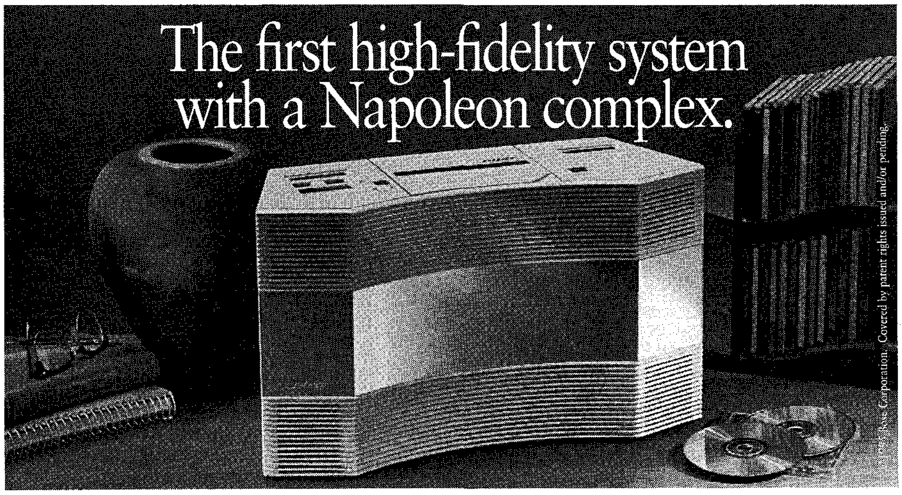
**Maxwell's,** 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (1-201 798-4064)—Dec. 10: **VELOCITY GIRL** (see the Mercury Lounge). Dec. 11: The **FLAMING LIPS** (see Irving Plaza).

**Mercury Lounge,** 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Dec. 7: **LOTION.** On "Full Isaac," their 1994 début, this New York quartet spun swirls of guitar with a fluidity that fit their name. They won over the British music press but went virtually unnoticed at home. The forthcoming "Nobody's Cool" (which features hyperbolic liner notes by none other than Thomas Pynchon) isn't much different, but it has a few well-delivered bursts of guitar, and it swerves in all the right places, just like the buzz-saw pop of old Hüsker Dü. Dec. 8: **MERCURY REV.** Dec. 9: **VELOCITY GIRL.** This indie quartet, led by vocalist Sarah Shannon, got together at the University of Maryland in the late eighties. They write appealing pop songs and rough them up with skittish guitar noise and unpredictable turns. In concert, they like to show off their tough side.

**Les Poulets,** 16 W. 22nd St. (229-2000)—The name may be French, but the music here is Latin: expect salsa, merengue, and the occasional cha-cha. Dining.

**Rainbow & Stars,** 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—The great cabaret in the sky. Rhythm and blues has arrived in the canny and capable hands of **RUTH BROWN** (through Dec. 9). She has assembled a topflight quartet, all of whom play solid R. & B. while she talks about her career triumphs, thanks her doctor, thanks someone who helped pay for her doctor, begs the critics in the audience to give her good reviews, makes allusions to her dress size, her age, and how long it takes her makeup man to do her face, introduces some flamenco dancer sitting ringside, and touches on other smart things and people too numerous to mention. Then she launches into an inspired version of Ellington's "I'm a Lucky So and So"—and it's only the third number. After that come a few standards, a couple of her old hits, an Eric Clapton song, a cut from her Broadway star turn, "Black and Blue," etc. She is talented and true to her art. She hits all her notes, gets all her laughs, is wise and eclectic and vulnerable without being mawkish, and she knows how to put together a real night-club act. An impressive show. Closed Mondays.

**Tramps,** 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—Dec. 6: **SUPERSUCKERS.** Dec. 7: **ERIC BURDON.** Watching the pretty boys of Bon Jovi back up the ever-sweaty Burdon on a medley of old Animals hits was one of the highlights of opening day at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. With **CANNED HEAT.** Dec. 8: **BEAUSOLEIL.** Named for Acadian resistance leader Jo-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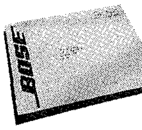

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seph (Beausoleil) Broussard, this marvellous band, led by fiddler/folklorist Michael Doucet and his guitar-playing brother, David, has long carried the Cajun music banner with equal portions of grace and grit. Dec. 11: **SHONEN KNIFE.** Several years and a few slickly produced major-label records down the road, the Japanese kitsch-pop trio's knowing naïveté and faux innocence—their songs include "Fruit Loop Dreams" and "Twist Barbie"—can now be as cloying as they once were charming. But live they make a joyful buzz. With the fine swizzle pop of Splendora, who will play songs from their breezy début, "In the Grass."

**WEBSTER HALL,** 125 E. 11th St. (353-1600)—A byzantine disco wonderland with four floors, a coffee shop, and a wig boutique. Wednesday is drag night. Psychedelic Thursdays feature grunge acts and cheap beer.

**WETLANDS,** 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Dec. 7: The Black Rock Coalition celebrates its tenth anniversary with **VERNON REID, AFRIKA BAMBAATAA** ("Planet Rock"), and D.J. Spooky.

KATE SHEPHERD

## JAZZ AND STANDARDS

**ALGONQUIN HOTEL,** 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Vocalist **ANDREA MARCOVICCI** is currently in the midst of an extended run. Dining.

**BIRDLAND,** 2745 Broadway, at 105th St. (749-2228)—Dec. 8-9: The **JAVON JACKSON** quartet. There's a beauty to the best work of this tenor saxman: he has a hard, inviting sound and the agility of an acrobat, and his skills seem to be growing by the month. Dining.

**BLUE NOTE,** 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Dec. 10: a double bill featuring the **JAMES MOODY** quartet and the **JOSHUA REDMAN** quartet. Saxophonist Moody is one of the greats, while Redman may one day be one of the greats. In the meantime, the well-hyped youngster better watch his back or the elder statesman with the whizzing tenor and the deadly sense of humor will devour him like an appetizer. The **STANLEY TURRENTINE** quintet takes over beginning Dec. 12. You judge a tenor player like Turrentine not by his virtuosity or his ideas but by his sound: a gritty, soulful calling card. He recently pledged new allegiance to his jazz roots, and, cleansed of his pop-funk noodling, he's now making quite a show of himself. Dining.

**BRADLEY'S,** 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—A duskily lit neighborhood bar, where pianists, bassists, and, occasionally, drummers compete for your ear. Truth and beauty usually prevail. Through Dec. 9: a trio featuring **BOBBY WATSON, GEORGE CABLES,** and **ESSIET ESSIET.** Dining.

**CARLYLE HOTEL,** Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—After twenty-eight years at the Café Carlyle, **BOBBY SHORT** is polished to such a high gloss that he's almost blinding to behold. Everything he does is breathlessly paced: tempos accelerate, notes ascend, hands clap, teeth flash. His speech has the arcane ring that comes from travelling in glamorous circles (if not in the real world, certainly in his head): "You're a knockout!" "What an audience!" "How chic!" "Wow!" Just as your attention begins to flag, he shifts gears and does ten minutes of blues with cheeky conviction. But all his mannerisms really come into focus the minute he sings Cole Porter, which turns everything else into a warmup ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **BARBARA CARROLL** is in attendance.

**FIVE SPOT,** 4 W. 31st St. (631-0100)—Having logged in some serious studio time on a wide variety of R. & B., pop, and Latin sessions, **RONNIE CUBER** (Dec. 9) is ready to prove that he's still one of the monsters of hard-bop baritone sax. Dining.

**IRIDIUM,** 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Artistically speaking, the pianist **MARCUS ROBERTS** (through Dec. 10) is a split personality. An ensemble player of great ingenuity and charm, he can also be a self-conscious soloist, substituting stilted structural ploys for emotion and ideas. Maybe this gig, which is being recorded for an upcoming album, will loosen him up. The **ERIC REED** quintet has the floor starting Dec. 12. Bandleader Wynton Marsalis has a real ear for pianists, and Reed, his latest hire, is no exception. He may traffic in Hancockisms and Tynerisms, but a distinctive gospel touch enriches his work. Dining.

**KNICKERBOCKER,** 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—Dec. 6-9: Piano and bass with **RONNY WHYTE** and **DEAN JOHNSON.**

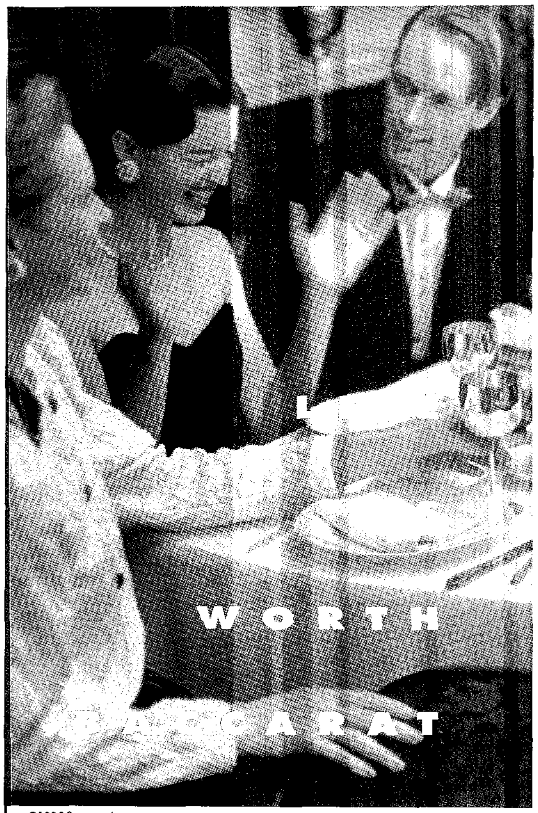
**KNITTING FACTORY,** 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Dec. 8-9: The **JAZZ PASSENGERS** with **DEBORAH HARRY.** Though they still enjoy a joke more than your average band, these days the Passengers take themselves quite seriously as musicians—a circumstance that has helped them survive as other eighties downtown figures have crumbled. At their least affected, they make clever, uncategorizable music. Harry is, of course, best known as the New Wave pinup who sang Blondie's sugar-shock pop songs in the late seventies and early eighties. Multiculti jazz makes a three-night stand starting Dec. 12, with **RANDY WESTON'S AFRICA RHYTHMS** and **JERRY GONZALEZ AND THE FORT APACHE BAND.** Weston has steeped himself in the music of North Africa, but there's still plenty of Brooklyn bop left in his piano. Combining the jagged pith of Thelonious Monk, the fragrant harmony of Duke Ellington, and the nasty rhythm of Bud Powell, he has a musical personality as urban as the M.T.A. As for Gonzalez and his band: John Coltrane experimented with all manner of genres, but he never got around to Latin music; they fill that gap with modal vamps and clamoring percussion.

**S.O.B.'S,** 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—**MICHAEL FRANKS** finishes up a three-night run on Dec. 7. Dining.

**SWEET BASIL,** 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Through Dec. 10: the **DANILO PEREZ** trio. Perez's piano work demonstrates what Jelly Roll Morton identified some seventy years ago as jazz's secret weapon: "the Spanish tinge." Perez is as technically dexterous and harmonically astute as anyone on the scene, and few of his peers have his gift for rhythm. The **MICHAEL CARVIN** quartet begins a run on Dec. 12. An unsung hero of the past twenty years, Carvin has provided sturdy and often inspired drumming with a crisp, modern approach for former employers like B. B. King and Jackie McLean; his work with his own group proves how much he's learned. Dining.

**VILLAGE VANGUARD,** 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Dec. 10: the **BOBBY HUTCHERSON** quartet. It took Hutcherson to translate the modernist grammar of sixties jazz onto the vibraphone. He's at his best when he glides into the spare, mysterious ruminations perfected on classics like Eric Dolphy's "Out to Lunch," but he also loves to strut his piston-mallet stuff on up-tempo numbers. Starting Dec. 12: the **JACKIE MC LEAN** sextet. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

**VISIONES,** 125 Macdougal St., at W. 3rd St. (673-5576)—Dec. 6: The Lynn Arriale trio. Dec. 7-9: The **JOE LOCKE** quartet. A new crop of vibraphonists has finally started to make some significant noise, and Locke is among the chief exponents. His work on Eddie Henderson's excellent "Inspiration" reveals a fluent, focussed improviser with prodigious resources. Dining.



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# ART

## MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

**Metropolitan Museum,** Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—"Rembrandt/Not Rembrandt." Through Jan. 7. . . . ¶ "Howard Hodgkin: Paintings 1975-1995." Luxuriantly decorative abstract paintings whose exuberant patterns and electric colors bring to mind the florid arabesques favored by such Bloomsbury lights as Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, and Dora Carrington; well installed and ravishingly lit, they seem to glow with an inner fire. The retrospective goes a long way toward solidifying Hodgkin's position as a torchbearer for what is left of abstractionism. Through Jan. 28. . . . ¶ "Goya in the Metropolitan Museum of Art." Through Dec. 31. . . . ¶ Black-and-white photographs by Hiroshi Sugimoto, chosen from three different series: "Seascapes," "Motion Pictures," and "Hall of Thirty-three Bays." Through Jan. 14. . . . ¶ "John Singleton Copley in America." Seventy-five paintings, pastels, and miniatures executed before 1774, the year Copley departed for England. Through Jan. 7. . . . ¶ "American Schoolgirl Needlework," fifty samplers and needlework pictures made between 1740 and 1850. Through Feb. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

**Museum of Modern Art,** 11 W. 53rd St.—"Piet Mondrian: 1872-1944," a hundred and sixty paintings and drawings, and a re-creation of the artist's last studio. Through Jan. 23. . . . ¶ "Alfred Stieglitz at Lake George," a large trove of photographs from the twenties and thirties, many never before exhibited, taken at Stieglitz's upstate retreat. Through Jan. 2. . . . ¶ A small show of works from the seventies to the present by the French Conceptualist Annette Messager, who combines photographed, painted, and drawn images with found and constructed objects and text. Through Jan. 16. . . . ¶ Uta Barth, Joseph Bartscherer, Ulrich Görlich, and Eric Rondepierre have contributed new photographs and site-specific installations to "New Photography 11." Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ Carrie Mae Weems's installation for the "Projects" series combines photographs, texts, wallpaper, and decorative objects. Through Jan. 2. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

**Guggenheim Museum,** Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"Claes Oldenburg: An Anthology." Through Jan. 21. . . . ¶ "Joel-Peter Witkin," a mid-career retrospective of the photographer's astonishing and horrifying œuvre. Through Jan. 14. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

**Whitney Museum of American Art,** Madison Ave. at 75th St.—"Beat Culture and the New America: 1950-1965," a loving, ambitious tribute to the angry young men of the era that nevertheless doesn't really solve the perennial problem of literature-based exhibitions: books in glass cases have little to say to people who haven't read them. Yet there are lively paintings—doodles, really—by Kerouac and Burroughs and a family-snapshot album of the movement by Ginsberg. Anyone who was a teen-ager during those years will feel the numinous pull of the manuscript of "Howl" and of the Teletype-paper roll on which Kerouac typed "On the Road." Through Feb. 4. . . . ¶ "Robert Frank: Moving Out," a large retrospective of the photographer's career. Through Feb. 11. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

**American Museum of Natural History,** Central Park W. at 79th St.—"To the Ends of the Earth" includes fossils, field equipment, maps, and memorabilia from fifteen of the museum's fossil-hunting expeditions—from Medicine Bow, Wyoming, in 1901, to the current Gobi Desert digs. Through Dec. 10. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

**Brooklyn Museum,** Eastern Parkway—"A Slice of Schiaparelli: Surrealism in Fashion." Fifty examples of the stylish inspirations of Elsa Schiaparelli (1890-1973): evening gloves with reptilian scales; a day suit with metallic ladybugs, grasshoppers, and cockroaches creeping across it; a hat of celluloid grapes; and more. . . . ¶ "Leon Polk Smith: American Painter," a retrospective of large geometric abstractions, most of them on oddly shaped canvases, by an eighty-nine-year-old artist who was inspired sixty years ago by his first sight of a Mondrian. Through Jan. 7. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

**American Craft Museum,** 40 W. 53rd St.—"Craft in the Machine Age, 1920-1945," a host of objects—furniture, textiles, vases, turned bowls, cocktail shakers, crystal—whose creation was influenced by modernist aspects of Scandinavian, French, and Bauhaus design. Through Feb. 25. (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 8; Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

**Asia Society,** Park Ave. at 70th St.—The second half of "Worlds Seen and Imagined," a loan exhibition of Japanese screens from the Idemitsu Museum of Arts, in Tokyo, is just as handsome as its predecessor. A screen representing the four seasons (circa 1500) links the conventional images of maple, bamboo, chrysanthemum, and plum with elegantly drifting clouds. "Whose Sleeves?," from the mid-seventeenth century, depicts a lady's boudoir, her kimonos piled up in tasteful disarray—but the lady has vanished, evoking the melancholy of a lover's absence. Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8; Sundays, noon to 5.)

**China Institute,** "Abstraction and Expression in Chinese Calligraphy." Each of the works in this well-mounted exhibition is accompanied by text that highlights a different aspect of the brush marks; the show makes a clear, gentle introduction to the most refined of the visual arts. Wen Zhengming, a sixteenth-century master, imparts a sense of urgency to his poem by setting one character just off center, like a syncopated phrase in jazz. The characters in Zhu Yunming's "Thirteen Poems" (1520) sprawl and swirl across the paper with the unruly eloquence of a Jackson Pollock. Through Dec. 21. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 to 5, and Tuesday evenings until 8; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

**Jewish Museum,** Fifth Ave. at 92nd St.—"Russian Jewish Artists in a Century of Change, 1890-1990," a large exhibition of paintings, sculptures, photographs, and graphic works by fifty artists, including Eric Bulatov, Léon Bakst, Marc Chagall, Ilya Kabokov, El Lissitzky, and Komar & Melamid. Through Jan. 28. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

**Morgan Library,** 29 E. 36th St.—"Fantasy and Reality: Drawings from the Sunny Crawford von Bülow Collection." The forty-six pieces on view, from a small, tightly focussed collection, form a delightful sequence of little masterworks from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, mostly by French and Italian draftsmen. Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

**Museum of the City of New York,** Fifth Ave. at 104th St.—"Growing Up in New York: The Photography of Arthur Leipzig." Black-and-white pictures, from the forties through the sixties, of children's games, East River diving, sit-ins, opening night at the opera, and more. (Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

**New-York Historical Society,** 2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W.—Forty maps of New York City and State, from the society's vast collection of Western Hemisphere maps. Through Jan. 21. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5, and Wednesday evenings until 8.)

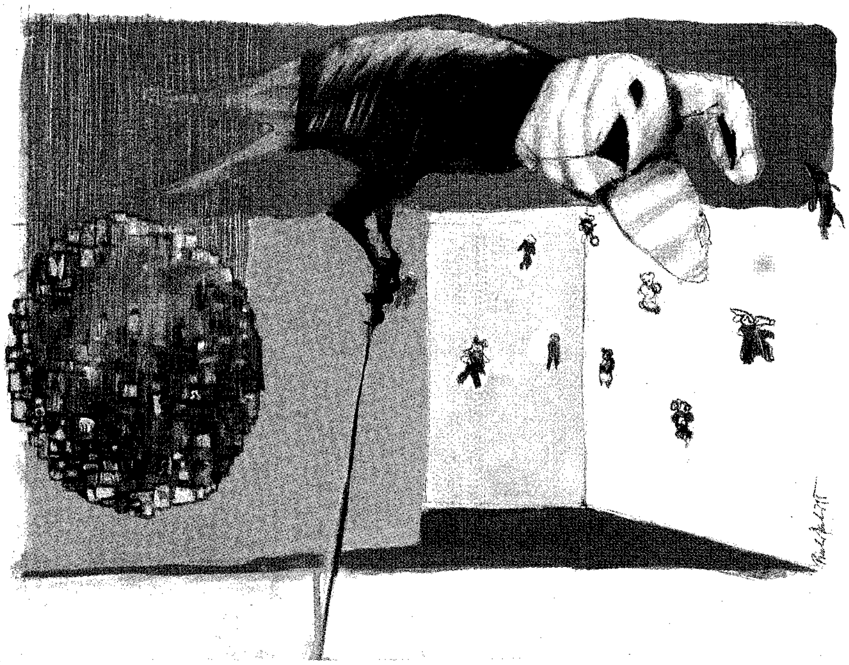
**New York Public Library,** Fifth Ave. at 42nd St.—"Flights of Fancy," thirteen drawings by Charles Addams, most of which appeared in these pages. . . . ¶ Part two of "The Collecting Adventure, 1895-1995" examines the way the library has preserved sacred texts, original manuscripts, and early printed books. Through Feb. 3. (Open Mondays, and Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 6.)

## GALLERIES—UPTOWN

*(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)*

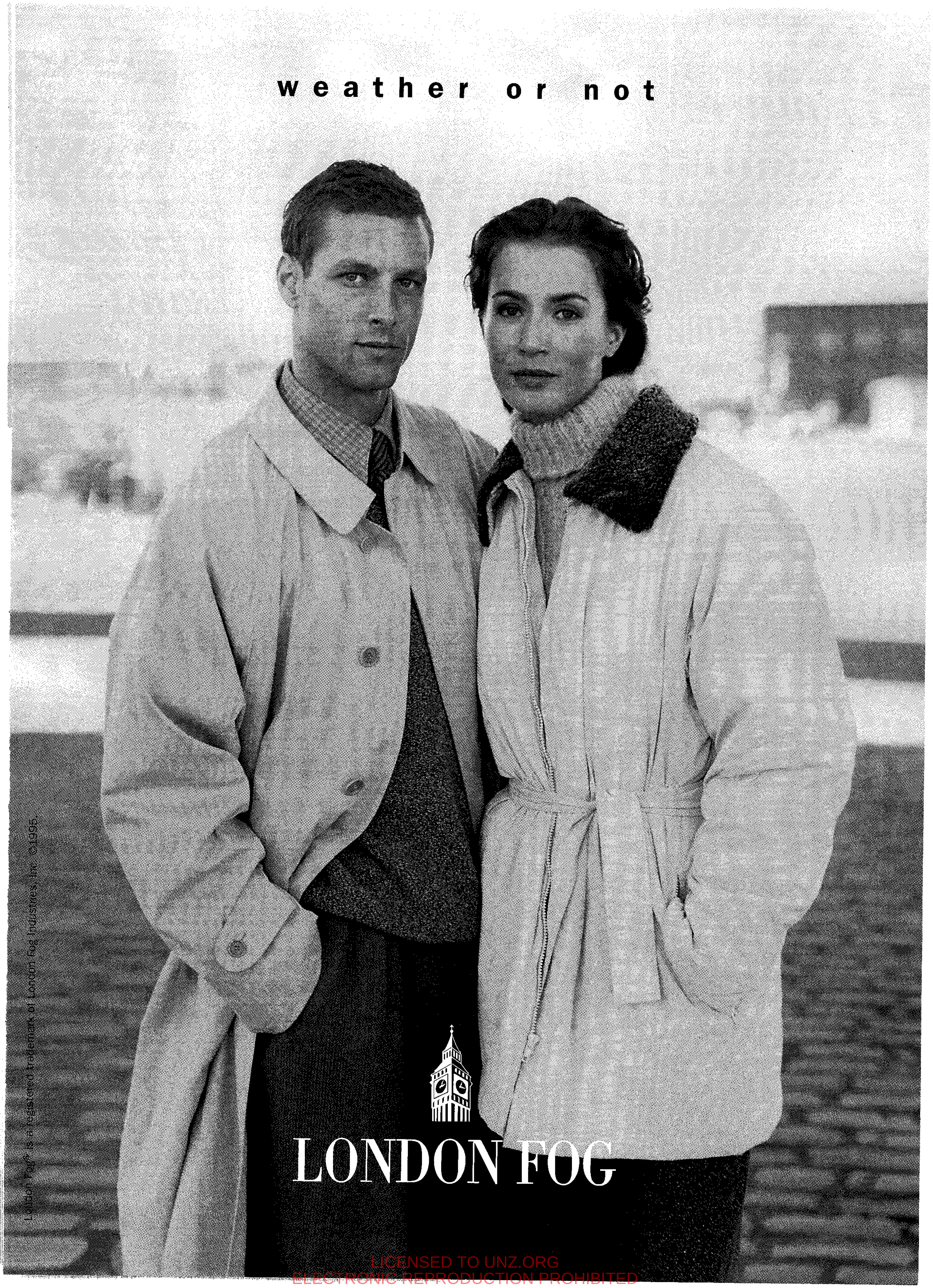
**Sigmar Polke**—Paintings from the late sixties through 1980 by one of the creators of Germany's answer to Pop art, capitalist realism. Here he experiments with unusual materials and often achieves mordantly witty effects; in "Dürer-hare" (1970), for example, he renders Albrecht Dürer's famous beast in outline, using elastic bands on wood. Through Jan. 6. (Werner, 21 E. 67th St. Open Mondays.)

**"Pulp Cover Paintings"**—More than thirty of those shockers that made thirties and for-



*A retrospective of works by Annette Messager, at MOMA.*

RICCARDO VECCHIO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ties mags like *The Shadow, Doc Savage,* and *Amazing Stories* fly off the shelves. Through Dec. 14. (Jensen, 48 E. 73rd St.)

**"Pop Art in America"**—A small exhibition that includes some of Pop art's best and worst. It's great to see the funky early Oldenburgs and a few classic Ed Ruschas. But how hateful Robert Indiana's "LOVE" is, with that tilted "O"—an image that found its true calling as a postage stamp. Warhol's masterly "Double Elvis" (1963), screened on a silver ground with the singer as a gunslinging cowboy, hangs next to the tacky, vapid "Myths" (1981), in which Andy compares himself to Howdy Doody, Superman, and Garbo. Through Dec. 9. (Marisa del Re and O'Hara, 41 East 57th St.)

**"Narrative"**—Paintings, photographs, and photocollages that demonstrate disparate ways that contemporary artists go about telling stories. The artists featured are Frank Moore, Tina Barney, Fred Tomaselli, Christopher Brown, William Wegman, and John O'Reilly. Through Dec. 23. (Graham, 1014 Madison Ave., at 78th St.)

**Short List**—**JAMES BARSNESS,** Adams, 50 W. 57th St. Through Jan. 4. . . . **ST. CLAIR CEMIN,** Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. Through Jan. 6. . . . **GEORGE GROSZ,** Soufer, 1015 Madison Ave., at 78th St. Through Dec. 22. . . . **LEE KRASNER,** McCoy, 41 E. 57th St. Open Mondays; through Jan. 27. . . . **DARRAGH PARK,** De Nagy, 41 W. 57th St. Through Dec. 16. . . . **DOUG SAFRANEK,** Schmidt Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. Through Dec. 23. . . . **JONATHAN SILVER,** Sculpture Center, 167 E. 69th St. Through Dec. 23. . . . **TONY SMITH,** Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St. Through Jan. 13. . . . **SAUL STEINBERG,** Baumgold, 128 E. 72nd St. Through Dec. 9. . . . **FRANK STELLA,** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. Through Jan. 6. Also at Castelli, 420 West Broadway. Through Dec. 16. . . . **ANTONI TÀPIES,** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. Through Jan. 13.

## GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

**Mary Heilmann**—New works on paper by a painter who brings an endearingly casual, soft-focus approach to the rigors of geometric abstraction. Heilmann renders nervously off-kilter grids and slightly woozy stripes in electric colors. In the rear gallery, she has installed a less successful suite of smudged, inky stripe paintings whose titles evoke waves and the sea; she'd be better off steering clear of Turner. Through Dec. 10. (Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

**Richard Prince**—The master of the postmodernist put-on tries his hand at real art—and it suits him. In this group of large paintings, Prince juxtaposes his trademark bad jokes with cell-like enclosures of computer-generated doodles and splashy Abstract Expressionist brushstrokes that overlap and tumble to the corners of the canvas like sloppy dominoes. Imagine Cy Twombly playing Grossinger's. Through Dec. 22. (Gladstone, 99 Greene St.)

**Gerhard Richter**—A near-retrospective of paintings emphasizing blurry gray images based on photographs from the early sixties, by a great German artist who defies categorization. In works such as "Administrative Building" (an utterly uninflected portrait of a squat government pile) and in paintings that depict groups of provocatively posed nude adolescent girls, he comes as close as any artist ever has to pure ambiguity: does he like the building or hate it? are the girls supposed to be sexy? We'll never know. An important exhibition. Through Jan. 13. (Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St. . . . ¶ Richter's comprehensive "Atlas" is at Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. Open Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

**Sean Scully**—Four new oil paintings from the stripe master: big and handsome, but should art really be in such monumentally good taste? Through Dec. 16. (Boone, 417 West Broadway.)

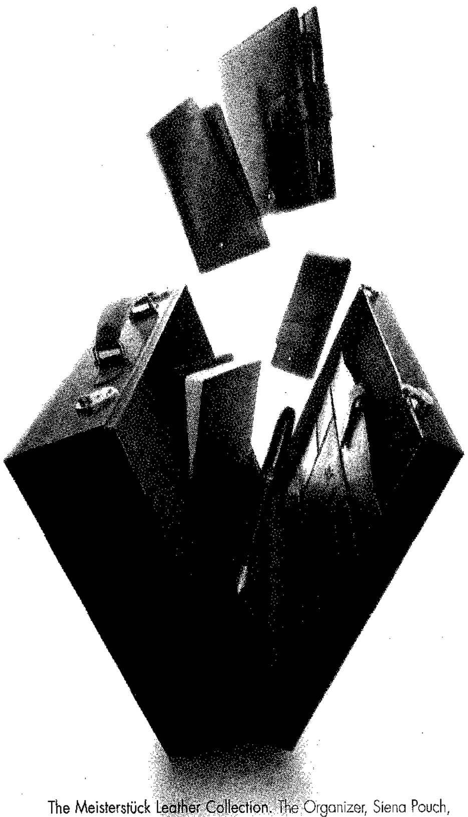
**"Paste-Up: Past and Present"**—A survey of art works made with pasteup and photocollage techniques, by Max Ernst, John Heartfield, Jess, Barbara Kruger, Man Ray, Mark Tansey, and others. Through Dec. 23. (Kent, 67 Prince St.)

**Group Show**—Large-scale sculptures by Chris Burden, Richard Serra, Walter De Maria, Robert Rauschenberg, and David Salle. Through Dec. 16. (Gagosian, 136 Wooster St.)

**Short List**—**MARINA ABRAMOVIC,** Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St. Through Jan. 13. . . . **BETH B,** P.P.O.W, 532 Broadway. Through Dec. 22. . . . **JO BAER,** Cooper, 155 Wooster St. Through Jan. 13. . . . **DANIEL BUREN,** Weber, 142 Greene St. Through Dec. 23. . . . **FRANCESCO CLEMENTE,** Blum, 99 Wooster St. Through Jan. 27. . . . **CHUCK CLOSE,** Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. Through Jan. 6. . . . **BRUCE CONNER,** Marcus, 578 Broadway. Through Dec. 22. . . . **MOIRA DRYER** and **DAVID IRELAND,** Gorney, 100 Greene St. Through Dec. 23. . . . **LIAM GILLICK,** Basilico, 26 Wooster St. Through Dec. 22. . . . **PRUDENCIO IRAZABAL,** Shainman, 560 Broadway. Through Dec. 23. . . . **BRICE MARDEN,** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. Open Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6; through Jan. 14. . . . **MALCOLM MORLEY,** Klein, 40 Wooster St. Through Jan. 6. . . . **ROMAIN PELLAS** and **DOMENIC DE CLARIO,** Thread Waxing Space, 476 Broadway. Through Jan. 11. . . . **CHRISTIAN SCHUMANN** and **SYLVIE FLEURY,** Postmasters, 80 Greene St. Through Dec. 23. . . . **FRED WILSON,** Metro Pictures, 150 Greene St. Through Jan. 6.

## OTHER VENUES

**"Serenissima: The Arts of Fashion in Venice"**—The history of Venetian fashion, from the



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Aristotle

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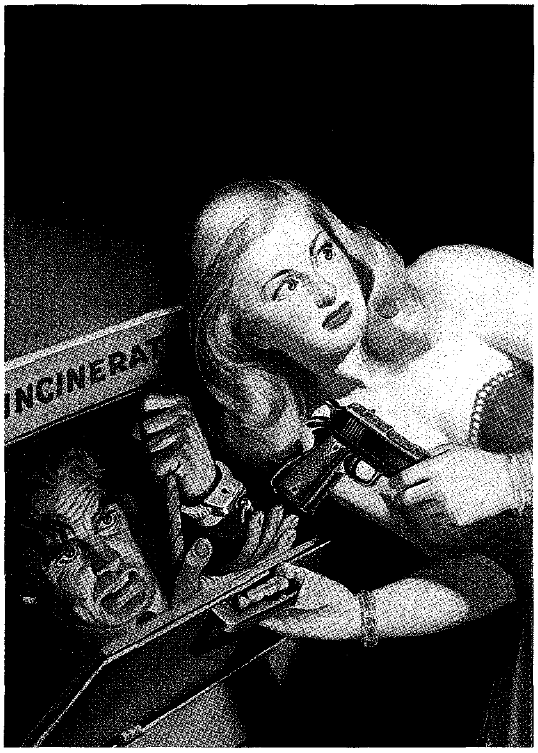


*"Pulp Cover Paintings," at Jensen.*

RAFAEL DE SOTO PAINTING, FROM THE ROBERT LESSER COLLECTION

thirteenth century through the eighteenth, as embodied in the dresses, suits, shoes, gloves, veils, masks, and textiles of the era. Through Jan. 20. (Equitable, Seventh Ave. at 52nd St. Open Mondays.)

**"ART, DESIGN, AND BARBIE: THE EVOLUTION OF A CULTURAL ICON"**—The thirty-six-year-old, eleven-and-a-half-inch überdoll gets a valise's worth of makeovers here, from the likes of John Baldessari, Zaha Hadid, Kenny Scharf, Robert A. M. Stern, and Andy Warhol. Additionally, you can view "Barbie's Ancestry" (including Ghanaian fertility dolls, Hopi kachinas, and the postwar German "Lilli") and say hi to other members of the gang (Ken, Skipper, Midge, Francie, Stacey). Through Feb. 10. (Liberty Street Gallery, 225 Liberty St., at West St., Battery Park City. Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 to 6; Saturdays and Sundays, noon to 5. For more information, call 945-0505.)

## AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

**CHRISTIE'S**—Dec. 7: Antiquities from the Bronze Age through the Roman era. (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000.) . . . ¶ At Christie's East: Auctions of rare Hebraic and Judaic books (Dec. 6) and of collectible film posters (Dec. 11). (219 E. 67th St.)

**SOTHEBY'S**—Dec. 8: Antiquities from the Perls collection, including an Assyrian gypsum relief of a winged-guardian divinity precisely dated to 856-55 B.C. Dec. 11: Materials relating to the Soviet space program, including the 1975 Apollo-Soyuz logbook and a canine high-altitude suit and pressure helmet, will be offered. Immediately afterward, Sotheby's will auction Einstein's seventy-two-page working manuscript of his theory of relativity (which will be relatively expensive if it sells in the range of its estimate, four to six million dollars). (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

**ARTS AND CRAFTS**—An auction of turn-of-the-century decorative arts, sponsored by David Rago. (Metropolitan Antiques, 110 W. 19th St. 463-0200. Dec. 10.)

**NEW YORK ARMORY ANTIQUES SHOW**—A hundred dealers offer a wide range of wares. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. Dec. 7-10. For information, call 472-1180.)

## PHOTOGRAPHY

**JOHN COPLANS**—"Self Portrait: Frieze," a series of oversized, headless nude figures (the artist, as always) in groups of two, three, and four, which runs in a loose band around the gallery walls. Through Jan. 13. (Rosen, 130 Prince St.)

**BRUCE DAVIDSON**—Panoramic, often wide-angle black-and-white pictures of teeming activity and precious solitude in Central Park. Through Dec. 9. (Burden, 20 E. 23rd St.)

**ELLIOTT ERWITT**—A retrospective of prints by the man who developed a subjective documentary style known as social-landscape photography. Through Jan. 6. (Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St.)

**ANDREAS FEININGER**—A retrospective of urban and industrial landscapes, closeups of seashells and plants, and portraits, by the former *Life* photographer, who is eighty-nine this year. Through Jan. 6. (Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St.)

**O. WINSTON LINK**—The veteran photographer's reverent black-and-white images of the Norfolk and Western Railway—the last American steam trains. Through Dec. 16. (Mann, 42 E. 76th St.)

**"FRIDA UNMASKED"**—Portraits of the Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, taken by family members, close friends, and lovers, including Lola and Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Nickolas Muray, and Diego Rivera. Through Jan. 13. (Throckmorton, 153 E. 61st St.)

**"THE HUNGARIAN CIRCLE: 1916-1940"**—A two-gallery show of vintage photographs and collages by trailblazers (Kertész, Brassaï, Moholy-Nagy, Munkacsi, Capa) and more obscure artists (Pal Angelo, Imre Kinszki, Karoly Escher, Josef Pesci). Through Dec. 30. (Greenberg and Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St.)

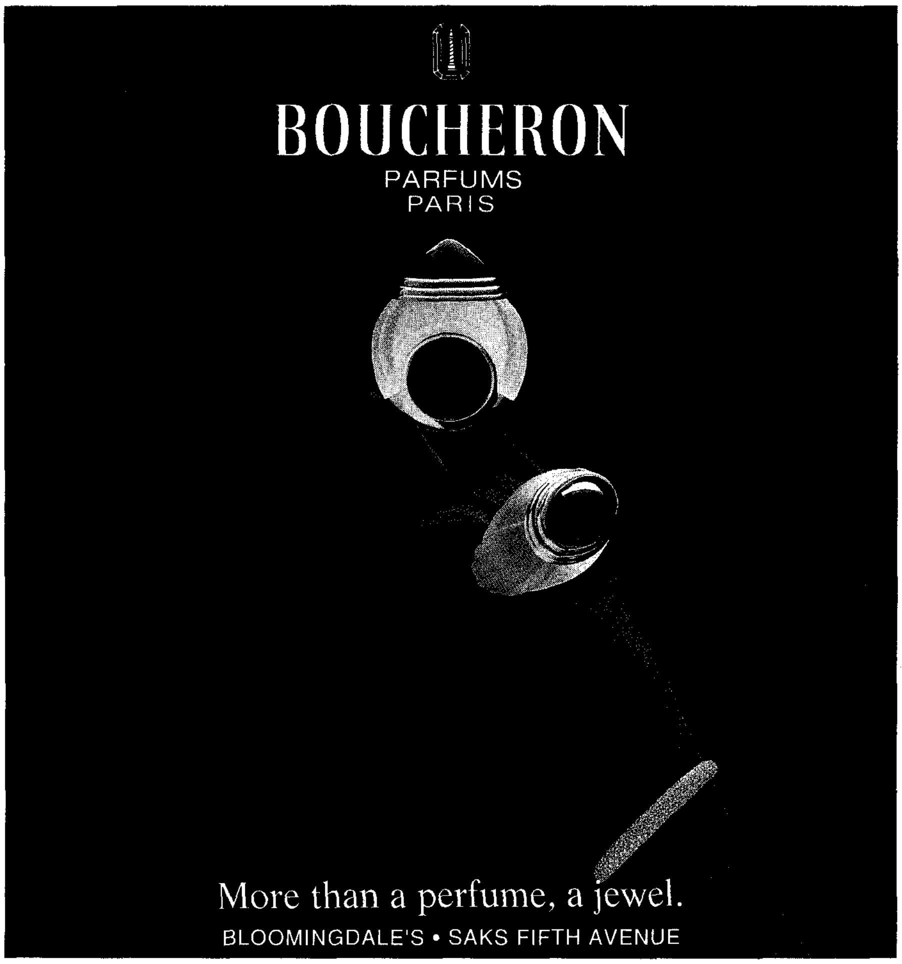
**"SHOOTING THE MOON"**—Lunar photography from 1850 to 1994, including large albumen prints, glass plates, stereographs, daguerreotypes, and NASA images. Through Jan. 13. (Saul, 560 Broadway.)

**"KISSING"**—More than seventy photographs of wondrous osculation, by such artists as Julia Margaret Cameron, André Kertész, George Hurrell, Ernst Haas, Nan Goldin, Danny Lyon, and Weegee. Through Jan. 6. (Richardson, 560 Broadway.)

**INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY MIDTOWN,** Sixth Ave. at 43rd St.—"Eve Arnold: In Retrospect," black-and-white and color images from the photojournalist's forty-year career: politicians, diplomats, movie stars, religious leaders, artists, and musicians. Through Feb. 11. . . . ¶ "Country Beside Itself," Lars Tunbjörk's colorful, idiosyncratic exploration of Sweden's changing commercial and leisure pursuits. Through Feb. 11. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

**SHORT LIST**—**CRAIG BARBER** and **MARSHALL,** Rice, 325 W. 11th St. Open Thursdays through Saturdays, 1 to 6, Sundays, 1 to 7; through Dec. 30. . . . **KAY SIMMON BLUMBERG,** Borden, 560 Broadway. Through Dec. 21. . . . **RALSTON CRAWFORD** and **RON JUDE,** Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. Through Dec. 30. . . . **JOHN DUGDALE,** Wessel O'Connor, 60 Thomas St. Opens at noon; through Jan. 20. . . . **EL LISSITZKY,** Schickler, 52 E. 76th St. Through Jan. 13. . . . **STEPHEN SHORE,** Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. Through Jan. 6.

*(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Museum of the City of New York.)*



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# CLASSICAL MUSIC

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## HOLIDAY MUSIC

*(See also Holiday listings.)*

**NEW YORK BIG BRASS**—Performing splendiferous works by Monteverdi, Bach, Tchaikovsky (selections from "The Nutcracker"), and others. (Medieval Sculpture Hall, Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Dec. 10 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

**I MUSICI**—The Roman string orchestra plays Christmas concertos by Corelli, Manfredini, and Locatelli, in addition to music by Bach and Telemann. (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 10 at 7:30.)

**A STOCKINGFUL OF CHORAL CONCERTS**—Dec. 8-9 at 8: The Dessoff Choirs sing music by Pinkham, Pärt, and others, with Gregg Smith on the podium. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ Dec. 8-9 at 8: The Barnard-Columbia Chorus and St. Paul's Chapel Baroque Orchestra present a candlelit concert. (St. Paul's Chapel, Columbia University; enter at Broadway and 116th St. 854-1540.) . . . ¶ Dec. 8 at 8 and Dec. 10 at 4: Clara Longstreth directs the New Amsterdam Singers in works by Bach, Persichetti, and others. (St. Ignatius' Episcopal Church, West End Ave. at 87th St. For information, call 388-8674.) . . . ¶ Dec. 9 at 8 and Dec. 10 at 7:30: Christmas music from seven centuries, performed by the Canticum Novum Singers. (St. Ignatius' Episcopal Church. For information, call 1-914 763-3453.) . . . ¶ Dec. 10 at 7: An audience sing-along of Handel's "Messiah," with the Musica Viva Chorus and Orchestra. (All Souls Unitarian Church, Lexington Ave. at 80th St. 794-3646.) . . . ¶ Dec. 11 at 8: The Tallis Scholars offer Renaissance music written to Marian texts by Heinrich Isaac and Josquin Desprez. (Church of the Blessed Sacrament, 152 W. 71st St. For information, call 666-9266.)

*The Cleveland String Quartet, at Alice Tully Hall.*

TOM CURRY

## OPERA

**METROPOLITAN OPERA**—**RISE AND FALL OF THE CITY OF MAHAGONNY**, with Teresa Stratas, Helga Dernesch, Gary Lakes, Kenneth Riegel, Timothy Noble, and Jan-Hendrik Rootering; conducted by James Levine. In English. (Dec. 6 at 8 and Dec. 9 at 1:30.) . . . **DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE**, with Heidi Grant Murphy, Sally Wolf, Deon van der Walt, Mark Oswald, and Hans Sotin; John Keenan. (Dec. 7 at 8.) . . . **DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG**, with Karita Mattila, Birgitta Svendén, Ben Heppner, Lars Magnusson, Bernd Weikl, Hermann Prey, and Mr. Rootering; Mr. Levine. (Dec. 8 and Dec. 12 at 6.) . . . **UN BALLO IN MASCHERA**, with Deborah Voigt, Elizabeth Norberg-Schulz, Dolora Zajick, Francisco Araiza, and Leo Nucci; Mark Elder. (Dec. 9 at 8.) . . . **LA BOHÈME**, with Hei-Kyung Hong, Diana Soviero, Marcello Giordani, and Dwayne Croft; Carlo Rizzi. (Dec. 11 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

**MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC OPERA THEATRE**—Presenting Hugo Weisgall's "Six Characters in Search of an Author," fully staged. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802. Dec. 6 and Dec. 8 at 8 and Dec. 10 at 2:30.)

**OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK**—In a concert version of "Norma," with sopranos Jane Eaglen and Sonia Ganassi and tenor Fabio Armiliato. Eve Queler directs. (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 11 at 8.)

## ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

**NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC**—Kurt Masur conducts Orff's "Carmina Burana," with soprano Harolyn Blackwell, tenor John Aler, baritone William Stone, the New York Choral Artists, and the Boys Choir of Harlem (whose members will also be featured in "The Christmas Story," a 1948 composition from the pedagogical series "Orff-Schulwerk"). (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 7-9 and Dec. 11 at 8 and Dec. 12 at 7:30.)

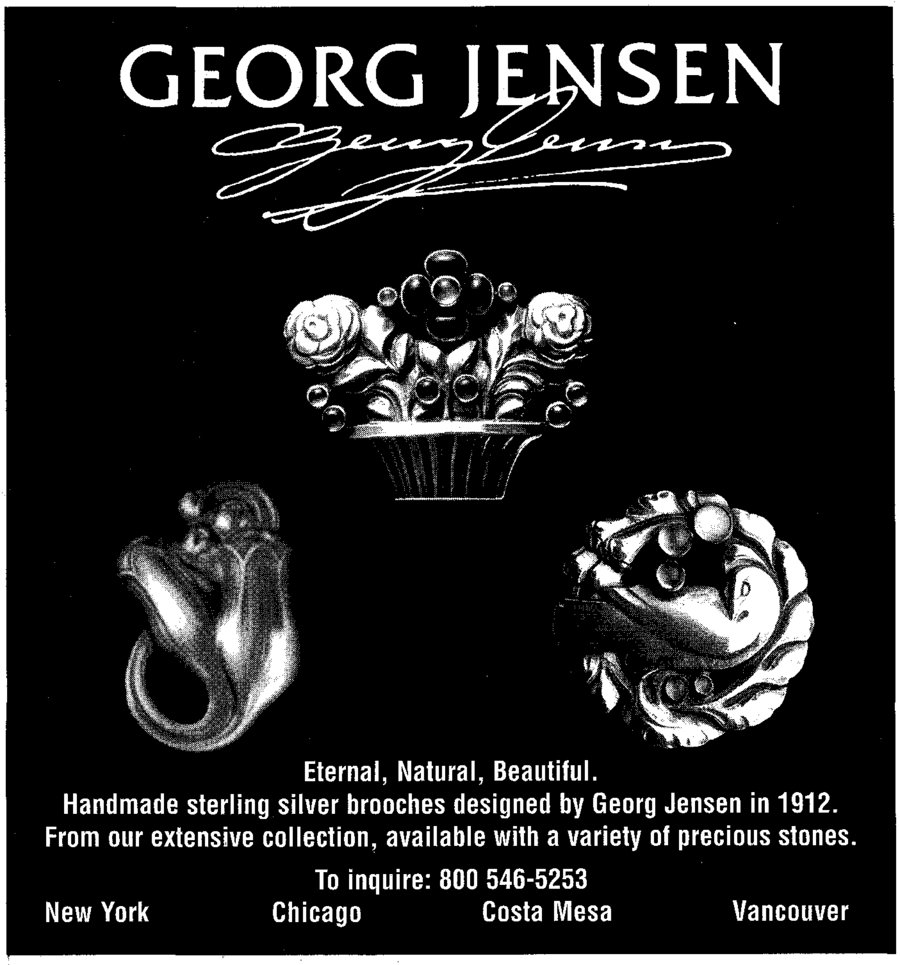
**MOSCOW RADIO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**—Vladimir Fedoseyev conducts Berio's "Quattro Versioni Originali della 'Ritirata Notturna di Madrid' " (derived from a work by Boccherini), Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto (with Vadim Repin), and Shostakovich's "Symphony in Five Movements 'Katerina Ismailova' " (arranged by Veniamin Basner). (Avery Fisher Hall. Dec. 6 at 8.)

**NEW YORK CHAMBER SYMPHONY**—Violinist Jaime Laredo leads works by Handel and Mozart, as well as Bach's Fourth "Brandenburg" Concerto and D-Minor Double Concerto (in which he will be joined by violinist Hilary Hahn). (92nd Street Y. Dec. 9 at 8. . . . ¶ Alice Tully Hall. Dec. 10 at 5.)

## RECITALS

**LEON FLEISHER**—Fleisher was already acknowledged as a supreme pianist when his right hand was beset by repetitive-stress syndrome, in the late nineteen-sixties. Rather than throw in the towel, he committed himself to exploring repertoire for the left hand alone, which turned out to be copious. In his first solo New York recital in thirty years, he will play left-hand classics by (among others) Saint-Saëns, Leopold Godowsky, and Dinu Lipatti, as well as recent compositions by Leon Kirchner, Robert Saxton, and Jean Hasse. There's good news about his right hand, by the way: last summer he was secure enough to essay a two-hand concerto (by Mozart) at Tanglewood, and he will repeat the piece in New York this January, with the Orchestra of St. Luke's. (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 6 at 8.)

**ST. LUKE'S CHAMBER ENSEMBLE**—Presenting an all-Bach program: his G-Major Viola da Gamba Sonata, Double Concerto for Violin and Oboe, Fifth "Brandenburg" Concerto, and selec-



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tions from "The Art of Fugue." (Weill Recital Hall. Dec. 6 at 8.)

**James Richman**—Harpsichordist, performing Bach's "Goldberg" Variations. (Merkin Concert Hall. Dec. 6 at 8.)

**Bargemusic**—Presenting Martinů's "Three Madrigals for Violin and Viola," Kodály's Duo for Violin and Cello, and Schubert's A-Minor String Quartet (D. 804). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061. Dec. 7 at 7:30 and Dec. 10 at 4.)

**Fauré Fest**—Soprano Benita Valente, pianist Evelyne Crochet, violinist Curtis Macomber, violist Maureen Gallagher, and cellist Jerry Grossman convene to celebrate the composer's sesquicentennial. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Dec. 7 at 8.)

**Helen Donath and Klaus Donath**—The wife-and-husband soprano-and-piano duo perform Peter Cornelius's "Weihnachtslieder," among other works. (Alice Tully Hall. Dec. 7 at 8.)

**Elizabeth Futral**—Soprano, with pianist Robert Tweten. (Weill Recital Hall. Dec. 8 at 8.)

**Guarneri Quartet**—The foursome plays Stravinsky's Concertino and Mendelssohn's D-Major Quartet (Op. 44, No. 1); mezzo-soprano Marietta Simpson joins them for Chausson's "Chanson Perpétuelle" and Respighi's "Il Tramonto." (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Dec. 9 at 8.)

**Cleveland String Quartet**—After twenty-six years of distinguished music-making—some twenty-five hundred concerts—the Cleveland Four are hanging up their hats. It's a harmonious parting: the members simply want to do different things with the rest of their lives. (First violinist William Preucil is the Cleveland Orchestra's new concertmaster, second violinist Peter Salaff has signed on as the Cleveland Institute of Music's director of chamber music, and violist James Dunham and cellist Paul Katz are committing more time to their faculty positions at the Eastman School of Music.) As a parting gift to encourage young ensembles, the quartet's members have created an endowment fund. In this concert—the final stop on their final tour—they will play quartets by Haydn (in D Major, Op. 76, No. 5), Brahms (in A Minor, the first piece the group ever played in public), and John Corigliano. (Alice Tully Hall. Dec. 10 at 2.)

**Three's a Crowd**—As if to counter Leon Fleisher's one-hand recital four days earlier, Dorothy Aaron, Anna Mi Lee, and Rosalyn Tobey will squeeze onto a single bench in a recital of piano music for six hands, by J. C. F. Bach, Rachmaninoff, and others. The program also includes performances of Asian dance, by Tani and colleagues. (Merkin Concert Hall. Dec. 10 at 2.)

**Michael Boriskin**—Pianist, in a program of twentieth-century works, by Gershwin, Debussy, Aaron Jay Kernis, Richard Danielpour, Toru Takemitsu, and George Perle. (92nd Street Y. Dec. 10 at 3.)

**Boston Symphony Chamber Players**—The ensemble, with pianist Gilbert Kalish, offers music by Beethoven: the Piano and Winds Quintet, the "Kakadu" Variations, and the Septet (Op. 20). (Carnegie Hall. Dec. 10 at 3.)

**Anne-Marie McDermott**—Performing piano works by Mendelssohn. (Merkin Concert Hall. Dec. 11 at 7.)

**Chamber Players of the League/I.S.C.M.**—The League of Composers/International Society for Contemporary Music explores aesthetic crosscurrents between China and the West, as reflected in works by Chou Wen-chung and others. (Asia Society, Park Ave. at 70th St. Dec. 11 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

**New York Festival of Song**—Presenting long-forgotten American theatre songs—by Gershwin, Arlen, Weill, and others—that failed to win their shows a place in posterity. (Weill Recital Hall. Dec. 12 at 8.)

**Camellia Johnson**—Soprano, with pianist Neal Goren. Presented by Young Concert Artists. (Alice Tully Hall. Dec. 12 at 8.)

**Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio**—The ensemble offers piano trios by Beethoven, Shostakovich, and Mendelssohn (in C-Minor). (92nd Street Y. Dec. 12-13 at 8.)

## ABOVE AND BEYOND

**Above Average**—Garrison Keillor brings the radiocraft of the Great Plains to Town Hall, whence for the next three Saturdays he will broadcast "A Prairie Home Companion." This week, the Persuasions, Beausoleil, and the Hopeful Gospel Quartet make the music; sound-effects man Tom Keith provides the prairie-fied noises—the chicken jumping off the diving board into the jello vat, the armed chicken shooting the wolf from the moving train . . . (123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Dec. 9 at 5:45.)

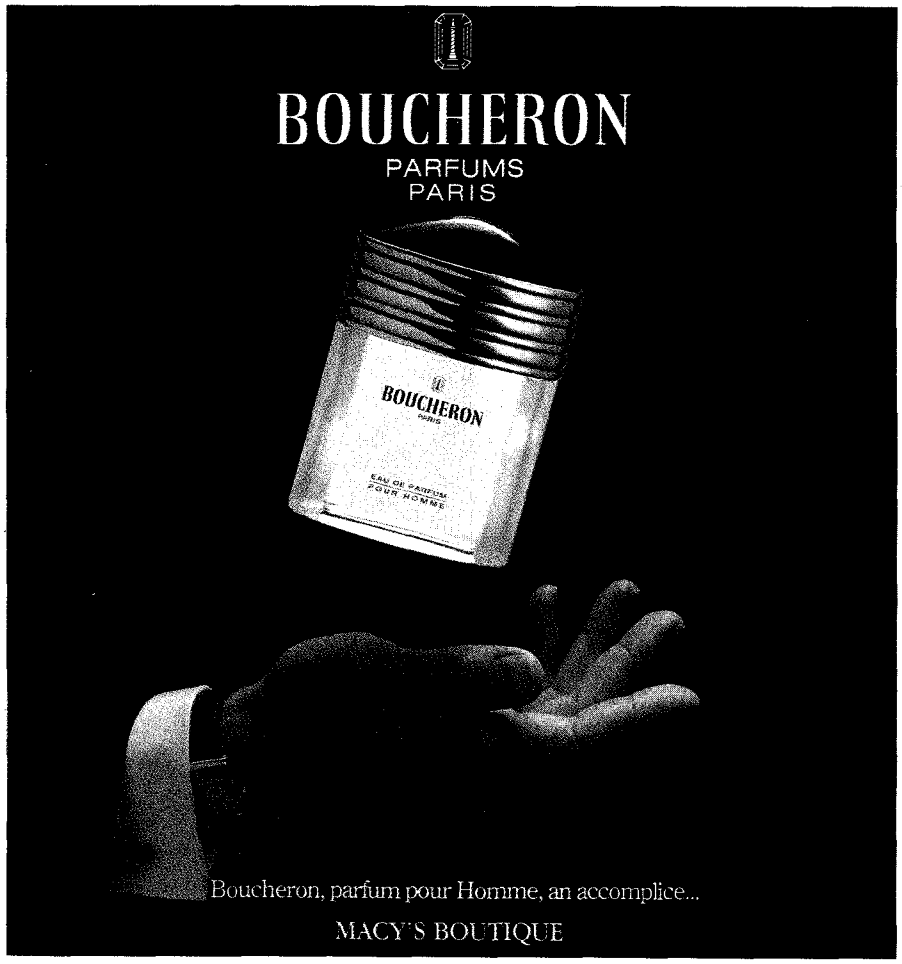
**This Is Not a Pipe**—Author and illustrator Chris Van Allsburg, who makes page-turners for the picture-book set, will be meeting his readers this Saturday at Books of Wonder. Van Allsburg's illustrations—a snowy train ride to the North Pole, ants exploring a vast sugar bowl, a boy watching through the window of his house as it floats by Mount Rushmore in a flood—bring Magritte-style visions to an appreciative audience. (132 Seventh Ave., at 18th St. Dec. 9 at noon. No tickets necessary.)

**The Years of Living Dangerously**—Professor and polemicist Noam Chomsky and Constâncio Pinto, of the East Timorese resistance movement, mark the twentieth anniversary of the invasion and subsequent annexation of East Timor by Indonesia with a discussion of the consequences of the occupation for the island nation's population. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. Dec. 9 at 2:30. For more information, call 1-718 788-6071.)

**Readings**—Dec. 6 at 8: Anselm Hollo ("Pick Up the House," "Outlying Districts," et al.) and Andrei Codrescu ("Comrade Past & Mister Present," "Belligerence," et al.) read their poetry. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door on the night of the reading.) . . . ¶ Dec. 8 at 7:30: Bruce Jay Friedman reads a selection from his collected short stories. (Barnes & Noble, 33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Dec. 11 at 7:30: South African playwright Athol Fugard reads from his autobiography, "Cousins." (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 645-5848.) . . . ¶ Dec. 11 at 8: Poets John Ashbery and Ron Padgett read from their work. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

**Talks**—Dec. 7 at 7: In conjunction with a Thread Waxing Space exhibition of objects from Philadelphia's Mütter Museum, authors Richard Selzer ("Raising the Dead"), Brooks Adams ("Grotesque Photography"), and others will discuss pathological specimens, obsolete surgical instruments, and the visceral art inspired by medical extremity. (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. Tickets at the door on the night of the event.) . . . ¶ Dec. 9 at 1: The New-York Historical Society minds the children for an hour while historian Geraldine Youcha addresses their parents on the topic of changes in childcare from the Colonial era to the present. (2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. 873-3400.) . . . ¶ Dec. 9 at 1: Chef Norman Weinstein shows how to handle a knife. (Broadway Panhandler, 477 Broome St. 966-0121.) . . . ¶ Dec. 12 at 6: Film- and trouble-maker Michael Moore screens clips from his recent news satire, "TV Nation," and fields questions. (Museum of Television and Radio, 25 W. 52nd St. 621-6600.)

**Tours**—Dec. 10 at 11 A.M.: Jill Vexler, from the Brooklyn Historical Society, draws on the borough's very recent history in her tasting tour of the bodegas, bakeries, and tortilla factories in Latino Williamsburg. For more information, call 1-718 624-0890. . . . ¶ Dec. 10 at 1: A restored 1928 D-Type Triplex train from the antique-subway-car collection of the New York Transit Museum climbs back onto the tracks for one more round trip to Far Rockaway. For reservations, call 1-718 243-8601.



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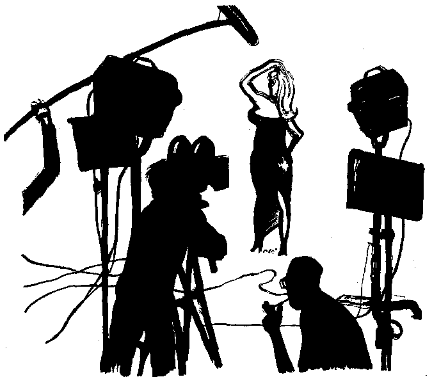


# THE MOVIES

## FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

**The Convent**—Manoel de Oliveira directs John Malkovich and Catherine Deneuve in a drama about a professor who visits a Portuguese monastery with his wife in order to study Shakespeare's origins. With Luis Miguel Cintra. In English, French, and Portuguese. Opening December 8. (Quad Cinema.)

**Father of the Bride Part II**—Steve Martin and Diane Keaton reprise their roles as contemporary parents in Charles Shyer's sequel to his 1991 comedy. Martin Short, Kimberly Williams, George Newbern, and Kieran Culkin are all back, too. Written by the director and Nancy Meyers. Opening December 8. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Sutton, 86th Street East Twin, 84th Street Sixplex, and Embassy 1.)

**Georgia**—Jennifer Jason Leigh and Mare Winningham play sisters who are both singers but lead vastly different lives. Directed by Ulu Grosbard. Written by Barbara Turner. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) Opening December 8. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

**Pigalle**—A stripper (Vera Briole) falls in love with a pickpocket (François Renaud) in this drama about life in Paris's red-light district, written and directed by Karim Dridi. In French. Opening December 8. (Quad Cinema.)

## CURRENT FILMS

*(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 34.)*

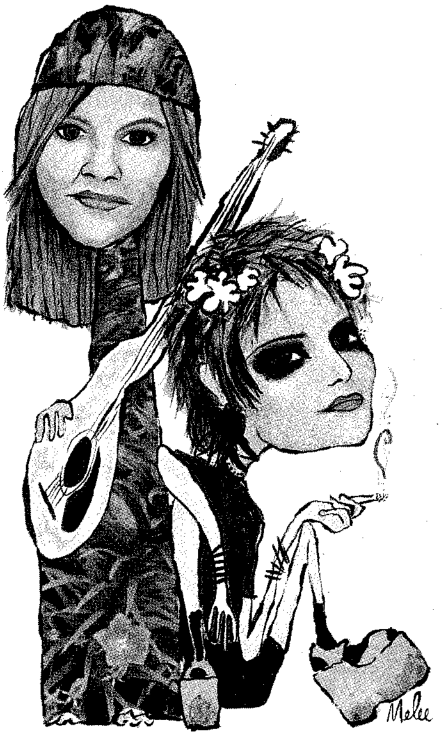
**Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls**—On paper, Jim Carrey's latest smash is just a bunch of strung-together set pieces that make the writing on last season's "Saturday Night Live" look hilarious. But like Jerry Lewis and, to a degree, Steve Martin, Carrey can make the idiotic seem inspired, and his manic mugging creates some big laughs.—B.D. (Village Theatre VII, Murray Hill Cinemas, Gemini, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Olympia, and Criterion Center.)

**Across the Sea of Time**—The latest Sony Imax adventure follows Tomas (Peter Reznik), a little Russian stowaway, through New York on a search for traces of a relative who landed at Ellis Island in 1904. The movie alternates beautiful old 3-D photographs with present-day joyrides (whiz through subway tunnels! dodge skyscrapers in a helicopter!). In less cheerful scenes, Tomas has trouble getting directions from indifferent strangers and is pushed and jeered at by a gang of kids in Central Park. Maybe it's because the technology is so new and still so awesome that it makes people seem like specks; whatever the reason, this New York looks strangely tense and lonely. Written by Andrew Gellis. Directed by Stephen Low.—S.K. (Lincoln Square.)

**The American President**—In Rob Reiner's romantic comedy, the Chief Executive (Michael Douglas) is a widower—a lonely guy in the White House. The script, by Aaron Sorkin, wastes no time setting him up with a nice girl (Annette Bening), who is lobbying him for tougher environmental laws. This dopey premise creates enough crises to keep the lovers from achieving their destined bliss until an hour and fifty minutes has passed; but if contrivance this monumental is what it takes to put over an "old-fashioned" romantic comedy these days, the genre is in big trouble. The picture benefits from hilarious bits by some of the supporting players—notably David Paymer, Richard Dreyfuss, and Michael J. Fox. It's a shame that the movie whose coattails these wonderful actors are attached to is such an empty suit.—T.R. (11/20/95) (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, 34th St. East, Coronet, Orpheum VII, Lincoln Square, and Criterion Center.)

**The Babysitter**—Before Alicia Silverstone starred in "Clueless," she took the lead in this drama about a suburban teen-ager hired to watch over three children. Written and directed by Guy Ferland, who based his screenplay on a Robert Coover short story. (Film Forum.)

**Carrington**—The life and loves of the Bloomsbury painter Dora Carrington, as recreated by writer-director Christopher Hampton. She was an average artist with a first-class libido, and it comes as no surprise that the camera is drawn less to her easel than to her bed. Trying to work out the list of its occupants, however, is a joyless and confusing task—her marriage is such an on-off arrangement that you never know when the husband will pop up next. Emma Thompson's Carrington looks mournful and besieged (as well she might), and Hampton allows the period detail and lazy pacing to muffle his natural Wildean gift for good lines. Jonathan Pryce (in a beard like a bramble hedge) rescues the movie as Lytton Strachey, who was Carrington's long-term love rather than short-order lover. Strachey's manner was all effeteness, but thanks to Pryce you sense the steeliness of



*Opening December 8, Mare Winningham and Jennifer Jason Leigh in "Georgia."*

ROBERT MELEE

purpose behind it. If only Hampton's movie could boast the same.—A.L. (11/27/95) (Paris.)

**Casino**—Martin Scorsese's movie about Las Vegas in the seventies and early eighties clocks in at close to three hours, and the epic running time is absurdly disproportionate to the stature of the main characters: a mob-connected casino manager (Robert De Niro); his wife (Sharon Stone), a former hustler; and a vicious gangster (Joe Pesci). These insectlike figures play out a petty drama of greed, jealousy, and depraved indifference to human life, while voice-over narrations try strenuously, and unsuccessfully, to persuade us that something weighty and tragic is going on. Individual sequences—mostly brief documentary-style passages—are lively and superbly edited, but none provides more than a momentary rush. The picture circles its empty center endlessly: around and around it goes, and where it stops nobody knows. Scorsese certainly hasn't forgotten how to make a movie; what he appears to have forgotten is why. Also with James Woods, Frank Vincent, and Don Rickles. Screenplay by Scorsese and Nicholas Pileggi.—T.R. (12/4/95) (34th Street Showplace, Beekman, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Waverly, Chelsea Cinemas, Ziegfeld, Lincoln Square, and Olympia.)

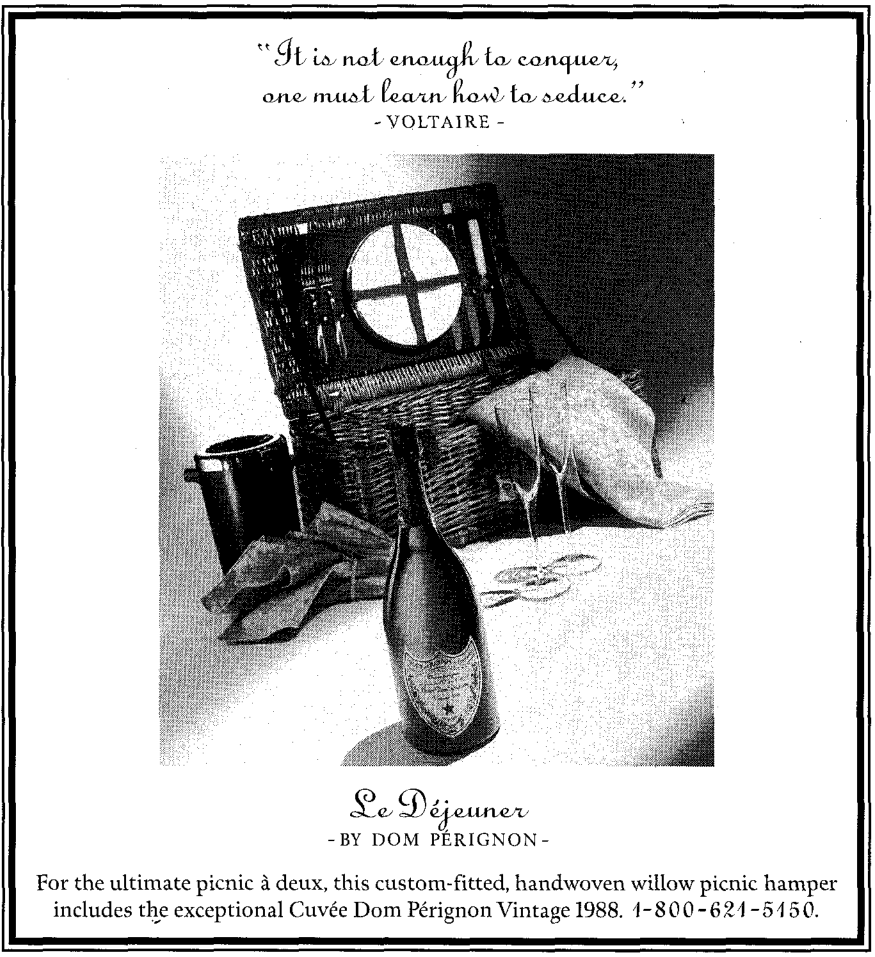
**Copycat**—Sigourney Weaver stars as a San Francisco serial-murder buff (great job) who is attacked by a particularly nasty specimen (Harry Connick, Jr., plus pimples) and spends most of the rest of the picture hiding at home. From there she helps a local cop (Holly Hunter) in the search for *another* murderer, whose idea of fun is to copy famous slayings of the past. The plot would seem more ingenious if the movie itself didn't copy so many other thrillers, and if it weren't so easy to spot every twist half an hour in advance. Jon Amiel directed.—A.L. (11/13/95) (Village East Cinemas, New York Twin, 23rd St. West Triplex, Lincoln Square, and Criterion Center.)

**The Crossing Guard**—Writer-director Sean Penn's story of a grief-stricken man (Jack Nicholson) bent on killing the drunk driver (David Morse) who ran down his daughter is brooding, contemplative, and rather colorless. Nicholson and Anjelica Huston, who plays his ex-wife, give performances that lift the film, here and there, above its earnestness; and Penn shapes the scenes of Nicholson drowning his sorrows in strip clubs with a sad, gritty lewdness. But ultimately all that melancholy stifles the characters.—B.D. (Angelika Film Center and Gotham Cinema.)

**Frankie Starlight**—This Irish-set film about a self-pitying dwarf who writes a best-selling autobiography tries to be a warm and magical version of "My Left Foot"; it fails. Frankie's childhood tribulations are a series of sympathy-tugging moments, and the conceit that in his loneliness he turns for comfort to the constellations and their myths reeks of New Age inanity. The director, Michael Lindsay-Hogg, handles his chores with such sensitive skill that he drains the film of any real tension: the story sleepwalks mournfully from scene to scene, and the cast, which includes Anne Parillaud and Gabriel Byrne, follows meekly.—B.D. (Quad Cinema and Carnegie Hall Cinema.)

**Get Shorty**—John Travolta plays Chili Palmer, a small-time Miami loan shark who winds up in Hollywood, where he discovers his true métier and fulfills his destiny: he becomes a movie producer. Scott Frank's screenplay is based on an Elmore Leonard novel. The director, Barry Sonnenfeld, doesn't have the dexterity to trap the story's tiny, quick ironies; he works too strenuously for laughs. But Travolta's no-sweat acting—which deftly captures the dry comic tone of Leonard's prose—keeps the movie watchable. Also with Rene Russo, Gene Hackman, Danny DeVito, Delroy Lindo, and Dennis Farina.—T.R. (10/23/95) (Village Theatre VII, 34th Street Showplace, Baronet, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, and Criterion Center.)

**GoldenEye**—The eighteenth Bond movie, in which Pierce Brosnan assumes the mantle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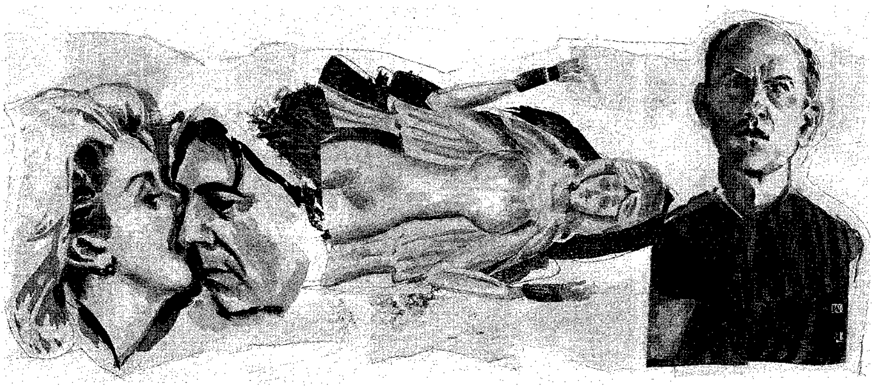
of 007, is a queasy mixture of the new and the old: it starts with a stunt that you won't believe and ends with the kind of explosions you've seen a thousand times; Bond's boss, M (Judi Dench), accuses him of being a sexist dinosaur, while his latest love, Natalya (Izabella Scorupco, who gives every sign of being a proper actress), has to stroll along in a white bikini under a vulgar sunset. (Although much of the action unfolds among grubby Mafia types in post-Soviet St. Petersburg, Martin Campbell, the director, can't resist Caribbean hideaways.) Jeffrey Caine and Bruce Feirstein's script promises more fun than it delivers, slowly frittering away its store of jokes and thrills. Brosnan, however, looks set to stay. He'll never recapture the amused cool of the young Sean Connery, but he does overcome the handicap of looking like a humorless male model. What succeeding movies will do with Bond is another matter: our hero may be running out of enemies. With Sean Bean as 006 and Famke Janssen as a Russian beauty with homicidal thighs.—A.L. (11/27/95) (Village Theatre VII, 34th Street Showplace, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)



*Opening December 8, Catherine Deneuve, Luis Miguel Cintra, and John Malkovich in "The Convent."*

WARREN LINN

**Home for the Holidays**—An ensemble piece for Thanksgiving, directed by Jodie Foster, in which members of a semi-ordinary American family gather to eat and bond and generally make life a complete screaming hell for one another. Foster connects with her cast (it includes Anne Bancroft, Charles Durning, Geraldine Chaplin, Robert Downey, Jr., and the funny and fearless Holly Hunter), but the tone staggers wildly, and long before the end any inquiring edge has dulled into softness.—A.L. (11/13/95) (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Tower East, Lincoln Square, and Metro Cinema. . . . ¶ Embassy 2; through Dec. 7.)

**Leaving Las Vegas**—In Mike Figgis's startlingly beautiful new movie, Nicolas Cage gives a great performance as a failed writer who is consciously drinking himself to death. Figgis tells the story as a series of vivid, intense moments; the sole trace of conventional drama is the hero's affair with a kindhearted young hooker (superbly played by Elisabeth Shue). But the possibility that love will rescue him from his fate vanishes quickly, like a mirage. Although the movie is terribly, crushingly sad, its honesty is invigorating: it names its poison and downs it, neat.—T.R. (11/6/95) (Village East Cinemas, Plaza, and 62nd & Broadway.)

**Mighty Aphrodite**—Woody Allen stars in his latest picture as Lenny, a New York sportswriter bored by his wife (Helena Bonham Carter) and attracted to a hooker (Mira Sorvino) who happens to be the mother—though she doesn't know it—of his adopted son. The movie treads enjoyably over old ground, though rather than cruising along with the ease of Allen's best work it tends to hobble, and it closes in a flurry of undecided endings. Sorvino's comic momentum rescues it. She offers the alarming prospect of sexual comedy without neurosis; you don't see *that* too often in a Woody Allen film.—A.L. (10/30/95) (19th Street East 6, Cinema II, 86th Street East Twin, Art Greenwich Twin, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

**Money Train**—Another "Lethal Weapon"-type buddy picture, filled with competitive energy and smart-ass retorts. This one stars Wesley Snipes and Woody Harrelson and has been polished to a high gloss by director Joseph Ruben (who did such wonders with another cookie-cutter screenplay in "Sleeping with the Enemy"). Ruben spends more time on token character development than this fluff requires, and the movie drags in parts. But when it gets to the action—the sensational robbing of an armored New York City subway train—the audience may feel that it's a token well spent.—B.D. (Village Theatre VII, Murray Hill Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, and National Twin.)

**Nick of Time**—John Badham directs this ninety-minute thriller in real time; the story—Johnny Depp must kill the Governor of California by film's end or his kidnapped daughter will die—is hyped at every turn by flashy moviemaking, and the suspense trickles away. Although the script seems modelled on Hitchcock's "The Man Who Knew Too Much," Badham has evidently forgotten how to invest a scene with the quiet menace that a good thriller needs. Christopher Walken, as the kidnapper, plays his usual bulging-eyed psycho with his usual aplomb. (Not many directors seem to realize that a little Walken goes a long way.) And Depp, a calm actor whose characters barely have a pulse, looks like he's in danger of suffering a heart attack from all the frenzied action long before the movie's preposterous finale.—B.D. (19th Street East 6, Murray Hill Cinemas, Manhattan Twin, Orpheum VII, Art Greenwich Twin, 84th Street Sixplex, and Astor Plaza.)

**Things to Do in Denver When You're Dead**—A retired gangster (Andy Garcia) rounds up his old cohorts (William Forsythe, Christopher Lloyd, Treat Williams, and Bill Nunn) for one final job. With Christopher Walken and Steve Buscemi. Written by Scott Rosenberg; directed by Gary Fleder. (Angelika Film Center.)

**Toy Story**—A team effort by the computer-animation company Pixar and Disney. The easy-to-follow screenplay, about the rivalry between two toys—cowboy Woody and spaceman Buzz Lightyear—should excite young children; teen-agers and parents can enjoy the brilliantly executed action sequences. The filmmakers have gotten around the coldness of so much computer animation by using the warm and friendly voices of Tom Hanks and Tim Allen. Yes, it's a come-on for Disney products, but all their children's films are about marketing; at least this one—unlike "Pocahontas"—has some zip.—B.D. (Village Theatre VII, Murray Hill Cinemas, Cinema I, Cinema 3rd Avenue, 86th Street East Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Guild, and Lincoln Square.)

**Traps**—A drama directed by Pauline Chan, set in French Indochina in 1950—on the eve of revolution—in which a journalist (Robert Reynolds) and his photographer wife (Saskia Reeves) visit a rubber plantation run by a Frenchman (Sami Frey) and his strange daughter (Jacqueline McKenzie). Written by the director and Robert Carter, from Kate Grenville's 1986 novel, "Dreamhouse." (Cinema Village.)

**Two Bits**—This coming-of-age story about a young Italian-American boy (Jerry Barone) and his dying grandfather (Al Pacino) during the Depression has a strong "Cinema Paradiso" feeling (the title refers to the price of a movie that the poverty-stricken boy wants to see). Joseph Stefano's sentimental script has the grandfather imparting all the wisdom of a lifetime in one twenty-four-hour period. While the director, James Foley, works hard to capture the somber, naturalistic ambience of Italian films of the forties, his touch is too often undone by Pacino's mugging. Still, the movie is worth a look, if only for the beautiful, touching performance by Jerry Barone. He has a face that De Sica could have built a great picture around.—B.D. (68th St. Playhouse.)

**When Billy Broke His Head . . . and Other Tales of Wonder**—An hour-long documentary that focusses on the life of Billy Golfus, its writer-narrator, after he suffered brain damage in a 1984 motor-scooter accident. Showing with "Franz Kafka's It's a Wonderful Life," a short by Peter Capaldi, in which the author of "The Metamorphosis" (Richard E. Grant) suffers a case of writer's block. (Film Forum; through Dec. 12.)

**White Man's Burden**—John Travolta and Harry Belafonte in a drama set in a hypothetical world in which blacks predominate in the middle and upper classes, and whites are a minority. Written and directed by Desmond Nakano. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 19th Street East 6, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

**Wild Bill**—What's refreshing about Walter Hill's Western is that it tells the story of a larger-than-life frontier hero without stripping him of either his dignity or his vitality. After a virtuoso opening, in which Hill supplies a dizzying nonchronological montage of episodes from James Butler Hickok's career, the movie settles down to focus on the hero's final days. Jeff Bridges is brilliant as the legendary gunman; he and Hill create a complex portrait of an uncomplicated man—a man of action who suddenly feels himself ambushed by reflection, and even, occasionally, by regret. This is an elegiac Western that somehow manages to be as funny and rambunctious and exciting as the unself-conscious genre classics of yesteryear. The picture finds the comic truth in frontier myth, and does so not by challenging it but by the simpler, more elegant means of looking it straight in the eye. The splendid supporting cast includes Ellen Barkin (as Calamity Jane), John Hurt, James Gammon, David Arquette, Diane Lane, and Bruce Dern. Hill's screenplay is loosely based on Pete Dexter's novel "Deadwood" and Thomas Babe's play "Father and Sons."—T.R. (12/4/95) (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Manhattan Twin, East 85th Street, and Regency. . . . ¶ Embassy 1; through Dec. 7. . . . ¶ Embassy 2; starting Dec. 8.)

## ALSO PLAYING

**APOLLO 13** (reviewed in our issue of 7/10/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **BABE** (9/4/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **BLUE IN THE FACE** (10/23/95): Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE BROTHERS MC MULLEN:** Carnegie Hall Cinemas. . . . **CLUELESS:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **DEAD PRESIDENTS:** Embassy 4. . . . **DEVIL IN A BLUE DRESS** (10/2/95): Movieland 8th Street Triplex. . . . **HOW TO MAKE AN AMERICAN QUILT:** 59th Street East Cinema. . . . **IT TAKES TWO:** Village East Cinemas, New York Twin, East 85th Street, 23rd St. West Triplex, and Lincoln Square. . . . **THE KINGDOM:** Angelika

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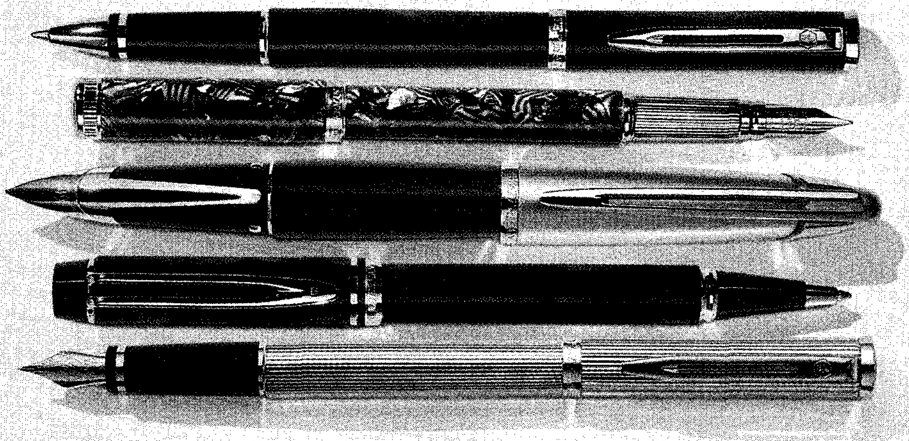

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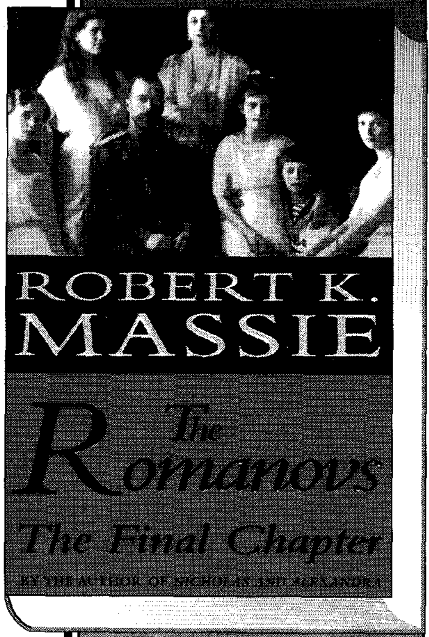

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—*Publishers Weekly*

RANDOM HOUSE

Some of the contents of this book originally appeared in *The New Yorker*

57. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Sutton. . . . **A MONTH BY THE LAKE:** Cinema 3. . . . **NOBODY LOVES ME:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **PERSUASION** (9/25/95): Eastside Playhouse, Quad Cinema, and Lincoln Square. . . . **THE POSTMAN:** Movieland 8th Street Triplex, Gemini, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **POWDER:** Village East Cinemas and Embassy 3. . . . **RECKLESS:** Village East Cinemas. . . . **RHYTHM THIEF:** Film Forum. . . . **SEVEN:** Village East Cinemas. . . . **SMOKE:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **TOTAL ECLIPSE:** 23rd St. West Triplex. . . . **UNZIPPED:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE USUAL SUSPECTS** (8/14/95): Sutton and Quad Cinema. . . . **WATERWORLD** (8/7/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **WHEN NIGHT IS FALLING:** Angelika Film Center.

## THEATRE ADDRESSES

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*(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)*

### EAST SIDE

**Angelika Film Center,** 18 W. Houston St.
**Movieland 8th Street Triplex,** 36 E. 8th St.
**Village Theatre VII,** Third Ave. at 11th St.
**Cinema Village,** 22 E. 12th St.
**Village East Cinemas,** Second Ave. at 12th St.
**19th Street East 6,** Broadway at 19th St.
**Murray Hill Cinemas,** 160 E. 34th St.
**34th Street Showplace,** 238 E. 34th St.
**34th St. East,** 241 E. 34th St.
**Eastside Playhouse,** Third Ave. at 55th St.
**Sutton 1 and 2,** Third Ave. at 57th St.
**Gotham Cinema,** Third Ave. at 58th St.
**Plaza,** 42 E. 58th St.
**Manhattan Twin,** Third Ave. at 59th St.
**59th Street East Cinema,** 239 E. 59th St.
**Baronet and Coronet,** Third Ave. at 59th St.
**Cinema I, Cinema II, and Cinema 3rd Avenue,** Third Ave. at 60th St.
**First & 62nd Cinemas,** 400 E. 62nd St.
**Gemini 1 and 2,** Second Ave. at 64th St.
**Beekman,** Second Ave. at 66th St.
**New York Twin,** Second Ave. at 67th St.
**68th St. Playhouse,** Third Ave. at 68th St.
**Tower East,** Third Ave. at 71st St.
**East 85th Street,** First Ave. at 85th St.
**Park & 86th Street Cinemas,** 125 E. 86th St.
**Orpheum VII,** Third Ave. at 86th St.
**86th Street East Twin,** Third Ave. at 86th St.

### WEST SIDE

**Film Forum,** W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
**Waverly 1 and 2,** Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
**Art Greenwich Twin,** Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
**Quad Cinema,** 34 W. 13th St.
**Chelsea Cinemas,** 260 W. 23rd St.
**23rd St. West Triplex,** 333 W. 23rd St.
**Guild,** 33 W. 50th St.
**Worldwide Cinemas,** 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
**Ziegfeld,** 141 W. 54th St.
**Carnegie Hall Cinemas,** Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
**Angelika 57,** 225 W. 57th St.
**Paris,** 4 W. 58th St.
**Cinema 3,** 2 W. 59th St.
**62nd & Broadway,** 62 W. 62nd St.
**Lincoln Plaza Cinemas,** Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
**Regency,** Broadway at 67th St.
**Lincoln Square,** Broadway at 68th St.
**84th Street Sixplex,** Broadway at 84th St.
**Metro Cinema 1 and 2,** Broadway at 99th St.
**Olympia I and II,** Broadway at 107th St.

### TIMES SQUARE AREA

**Criterion Center,** Broadway at 44th St.
**Embassy 1,** Broadway at 46th St.
**Embassy 2, 3, and 4,** Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
**Astor Plaza,** 44th St. at Broadway.
**National Twin,** Broadway at 44th St.

## REVIVALS

*(The following notes are by Pauline Kael, Terrence Rafferty, and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)*

**Ball of Fire** (1942)—The romantic collision of Sugarpuss O'Shea, a burlesque dancer (Barbara Stanwyck), and Bertram Potts, a fuddy-duddy professor (Gary Cooper), is played as if it were terribly bright, but it's rather shrill and tiresome. Howard Hawks directed, but Brackett and Wilder did the script, and Wilder's influence seems strong. The professor's colleagues have corny cute names and carry on like people left over from a stock-company Viennese operetta. The cast includes Dana Andrews, Dan Duryea, and Allen Jenkins.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; Dec. 10-11.)

**The Great Profile** (1940)—In his later years, the boozing John Barrymore kept his career going by buffoonery and self-caricature. A lot of people found this film's exploitation of his fallen reputation offensive, but his antics and his wordplay are very funny. This cynical burlesque (in which he performs with a troupe of acrobats) has some low, wild moments. He *enjoys* horsing around. Directed by Walter Lang.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; Dec. 6.)

**Me and My Brother** (1969)—The photographer Robert Frank made this film about Julius Orlovsky, a catatonic boy released from a state institution, and how he is taken care of by his brother, Peter Orlovsky, and Allen Ginsberg. Julius appears in the film and is also acted in some sequences by Joseph Chaikin. Frank tries to investigate insanity, methods of treatment, the nature of acting, the nature of what one records on film, and so on; he tries to do too much, and the viewer doesn't get a chance to sort out his own reactions.—P.K. (Whitney Museum; Dec. 6-10.)

**My Favorite Wife** (1940)—Tennyson wrote "Enoch Arden" in 1864, and the movies have been making versions of it ever since D. W. Griffith did it in 1908 (and again in 1911). This one is the most famous and the funniest. On the day Cary Grant (as Nick Arden) marries Gail Patrick, his wife, Irene Dunne, shipwrecked seven years before, comes home. She follows the newlyweds on their honeymoon, prevents the consummation of their marriage, and, like a smart kitty, purrs herself to an ultimate victory. Garson Kanin was twenty-seven (and at his liveliest) when he directed this screwball-classic hit. Randolph Scott plays the vegetarian scientist who was Dunne's companion on the island.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; Dec. 8-9.)

**The Restless Conscience** (1992)—Hava Kohav Beller's film has all the standard characteristics of a good-for-you, "educational" documentary. The subject is a noble one—the history of German resistance to Nazism—and the technique is familiar: Beller patiently assembles still photographs, archival footage, and talking-heads interviews, and links these elements with a solemn, omniscient voice-over narration read by a man with a deep voice. But nuts-and-bolts filmmaking can sometimes generate epiphanies. Beller's plain, unembellished style is, it turns out, all that this great subject really needs. The movie's relative artlessness is a sign of respect, and its thoroughness is the proof of its passion.—T.R. (Miller Theatre; Dec. 12.)

**Tom Sawyer** (1973)—As screenwriters, the brother team of Richard M. and Robert B. Sherman rendered a faithful, lively compression of Mark Twain's beloved boys' adventure. As songwriters, they diluted it with a score that looked back to "The Music Man" and their own candy corn (in such Disney films as "The Jungle Book") and ahead to Roger Miller's score for Broadway's 1985 Huck Finn spectacle, "Big River." Nevertheless, this handsome production—made for Reader's Digest and United Artists—boasts a few flavorful performances. If Johnny Whitaker's Tom is even more of a ham than Twain's, and if Jeff East makes a bland Huck, Jodie Foster still percolates as Becky Thatcher, Warren Oates exudes boozy charm as Muff Potter,

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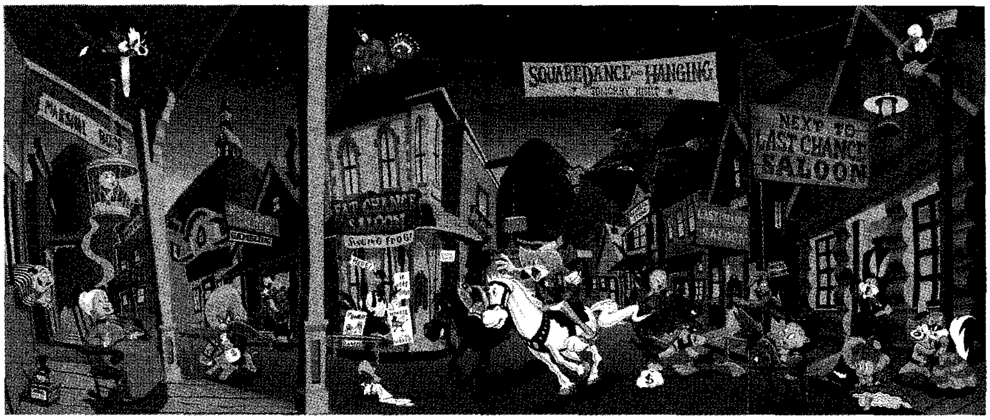
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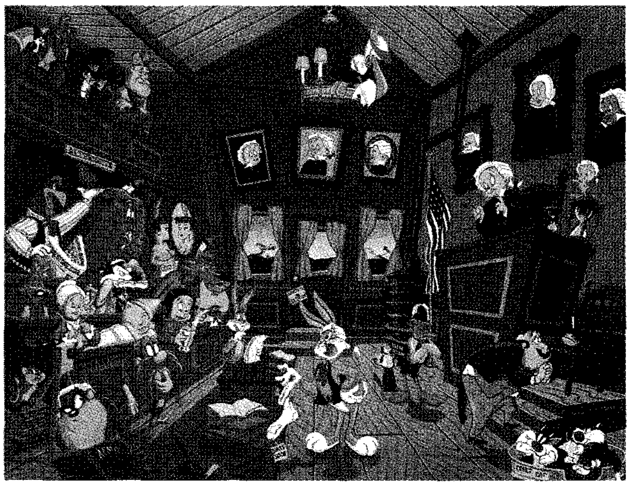

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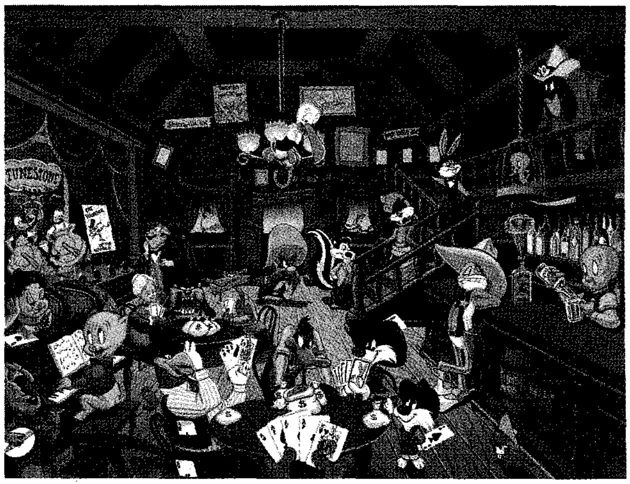

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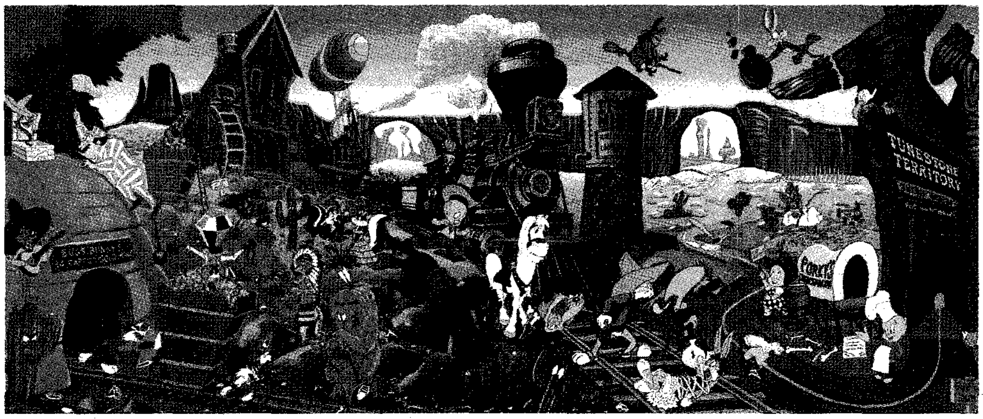
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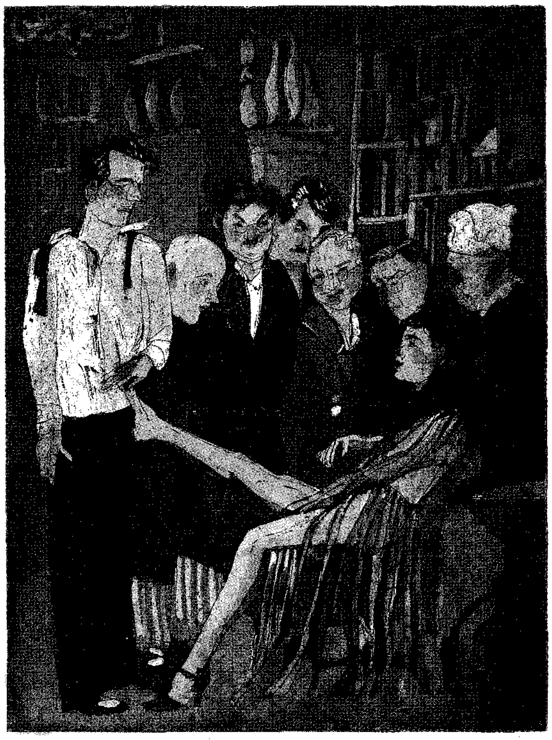


*Gary Cooper and Barbara Stanwyck in “Ball of Fire.”*

ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

and Lucille Benson brings a Dickensian outlandishness to the Widow Douglas. With Celeste Holm as Aunt Polly and Kunu Hank as Injun Joe. Don Taylor directed.—M.S. (Walter Reade Theatre; Dec. 9-10.)

**Wife, Husband and Friend** (1939)—A down-to-earth contractor (Warner Baxter) musically outclasses his swank wife (Loretta Young), an aspiring diva, when he brings *his* singing out of the bathroom and onto the stage. The shrewd premise of this marital comedy is that opera is a trap for American snobs; the movie has the drive of real farce when it lampoons their pretensions. Unfortunately, the script doubles back on itself by refusing to allow the husband (and us) to revel in his natural vocal power. His mentor (Binnie Barnes) isn't just a renowned classical artist—she's also a selfish vamp who does her best to sabotage his marriage. The picture provides no good reason to root for the couple's reconciliation, but Young is so glisteningly pretty that she almost makes it work. Gregory Ratoff directed. Nunnally Johnson wrote the amiable if flat adaptation of James M. Cain's novel “Career in C Major” (and wrote and produced a 1949 remake, “Everybody Does It”).—M.S. (Film Forum 2; Dec. 7.)

## LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

*(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)*

**Film Forum 2,** W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Screwball comedies from the thirties and forties. Dec. 6: “The Great Profile” (†), “World Première” (1941, Ted Tetzlaff), and “Curtain Call” (1940, Frank Woodruff).... Dec. 7: “Mr. and Mrs. Smith” (1941, Alfred Hitchcock) and “Wife, Husband and Friend” (†).... Dec. 8-9: “My Favorite Wife” (†) and “Bachelor Mother” (1939, Garson Kanin).... Dec. 10-11: “Ball of Fire” (†) and “The Mad Miss Manton” (1938, Leigh Jason).... Dec. 12: “La Nuit Fantastique” (1941, Marcel L'Herbier; in French) and “The Rage of Paris” (1938, Henry Koster).

**Museum of Modern Art,** Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A series of films from Australia. Dec. 7 at 2:30 and Dec. 8 at 6: “Holidays on the River Yarra” (1991, Leo Berkeley).... Dec. 7 at 6 and Dec. 9 at 2: “Return Home” (1990, Ray Argall).... Dec. 8 at 2:30 and Dec. 9 at 5: “Custody” (1987, Ian Munro).... Dec. 8 at 8: “The Back of Beyond” (1954, John Heyer).... Dec. 10 at 2 and Dec. 11 at 6: “Mull” (1989, Don McLennan).... Dec. 10 at 5 and Dec. 11 at 2:30: “Strikebound” (1984, Richard Lowenstein).... Dec. 12 at 2:30: “Heatwave” (1982, Phillip Noyce).... Dec. 12 at 6: “The Sentimental Bloke” (1919) and “On Our Selection” (1920), both by Raymond Longford.... ¶ Dec. 7 at 3 and 6: “Full Circle” (1995, Paul Rothman).... ¶ Dec. 8 at 6 and Dec. 9 at 5: “King of Jazz” (1930, John Murray Anderson).... ¶ Dec. 8 at 8 and Dec. 9 at 2: “The Treasure of the Sierra Madre” (1948, John Huston).... ¶ Dec. 10 at 2:30 and Dec. 12 at 3: “The Making of a Movie” (1957, Tom Ryan) and “Satyajit Ray—Introspections” (1990, K. Bikram Singh).... ¶ Dec. 10 at 5: “Before the Nickelodeon: The Early Cinema of Edwin S. Porter” (1982, Charles Musser) and “Correction Please; or, How We Got Into Pictures” (1979, Noel Burch).... ¶ Dec. 12 at 6: “Germany Awake!” (1968, Erwin Leiser).

**Walter Reade Theatre,** Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level (875-5600)—A series of films on dance. Dec. 6 at 2 and 4 and Dec. 7 at 8: “The Dancer” (1994, Donya Feuer).... Dec. 7 at 2, 4, and 6: “Velasquez's Little Museum” (1994, Bernar Hébert) and “M. M. in Motion” (1992, Vivian Ostrovsky).... ¶ A two-week program of new films from Spain; all in Spanish, with English subtitles. Dec. 8 at 2 and 6:15 and Dec. 10 at 6:30: “Children of the Wind” (Fernando Merinero).... Dec. 8 at 4:15 and 8:30 and Dec. 9 at 6:15: “Nobody Will Speak of Us When We're Dead” (Augustín Díaz Yanes).... Dec. 9 at 4 and 8:30: “King of the River” (Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón).... Dec. 10 at 4 and 8:45: “Turkish Passion” (Vicente Aranda).... Dec. 11 at 2 and 6:15 and Dec. 12 at 4: “The Lame Pigeon” (Jaime de Armiñan).... Dec. 11 at 4:15 and 8:30 and Dec. 12 at 2: “Mouth to Mouth” (Manuel Gómez Pereira).... ¶ Weekend showings for children. Dec. 9-10 at 2: “Tom Sawyer” (†).

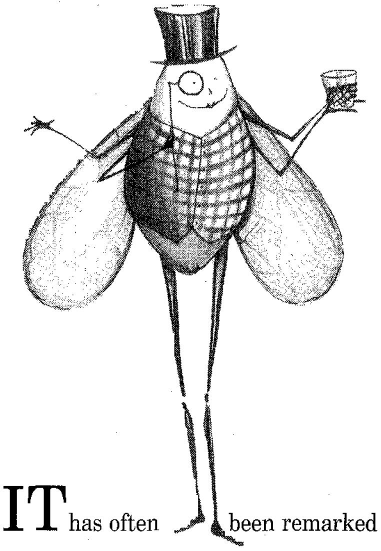
**American Museum of the Moving Image,** 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (1-718 784-0077)—Four films made by the Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai; all in Cantonese, with English subtitles. Dec. 9 at 2: “Chungking Express” (1994).... Dec. 9 at 5: “Days of Being Wild” (1991).... Dec. 10 at 2: “Ashes of Time” (1994).... Dec. 10 at 4: “As Tears Go By” (1988).

**Florence Gould Hall,** 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Dec. 12 at 12:30, 3:15, 6, and 8:45: “Beauty and the Beast” (1946, Jean Cocteau; in French).

**Whitney Museum,** Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-0537)—“Beat Culture and the New America: 1950-65.” Dec. 6 at 1:30 and Dec. 7 at 2:30: “Anticipation of the Night” (1958, Stan Brakhage).... Dec. 8-10 at 1:30: “Happenings: One” (1962), and “Happenings: Two” (1962), both by Raymond Saroff.... ¶ Films directed by Robert Frank. Dec. 6 at 4, Dec. 7 at 6:15, and Dec. 8-10 at 4: “Me and My Brother” (†).

**Miller Theatre,** Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. (854-7799)—Documentaries that have been nominated for or have won the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature or Best Documentary Short Subject. Dec. 6 at 7:30: “The Day After Trinity” (1980, Jon Else) and “Close Harmony” (1981, Nigel Noble).... Dec. 12 at 7:30: “The Restless Conscience” (†).

HAMISH
NOT
SQUEAMISH



IT has often been remarked that devotees of The Macallan Malt Whisky nurture an almost mystical belief in the ‘water of life’ qualities of their favourite dram. But seldom has it found such expression as in the following true anecdote kindly related to us by Mr C. Wemyss of Ravenhead, Notts.

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“The Macallan never hurt a fly, and nor does a fly hurt The Macallan!” Ten minutes later indeed the insect stirred and flew off.

“There you are,” said Hamish triumphantly. “And now you can give me a *gnat's more*.” ’

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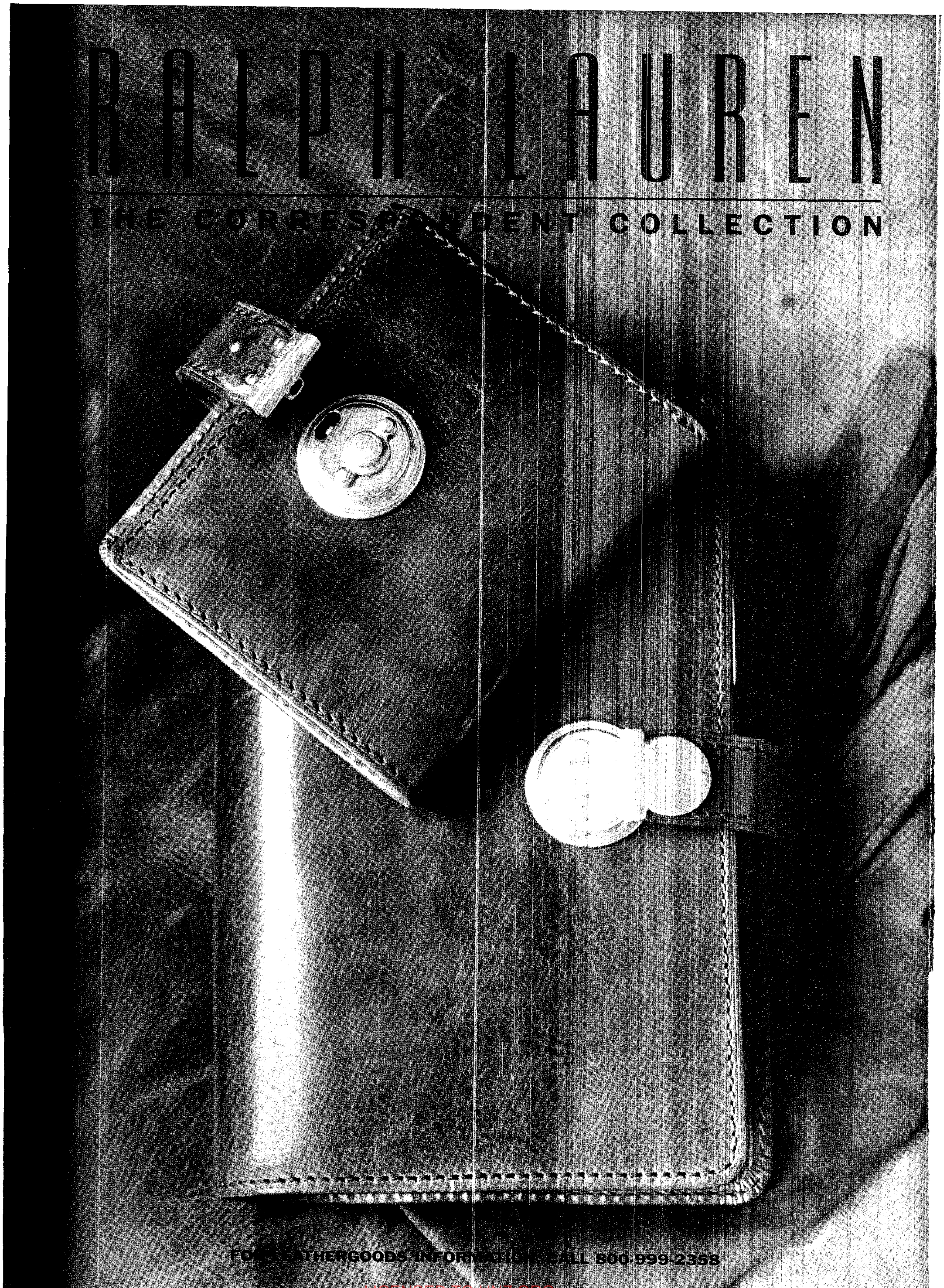
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# THE NEW YORKER

# THE TALK OF THE TOWN

## THE ENVELOPE PLEAS

If you sense a heightened desperation and impishness in charity fund-raising appeals this season, you're not imagining things. "With the fiscal crunch in the cities now, governments can't help us with our bills," said Truda Jewett, the assistant executive director of the Children's Aid Society. "We have to raise more of our own money, so we have to be a lot more creative."

Charities have sent out direct mail for years, but these days they're forsaking the tasteful written appeal for the same techniques used by promoters of those "free" vacation offers. Direct mail has evolved into an advanced, slightly hokey crypto-science, which employs extensive "psychographic" profiles of letter recipients, tomes of demographic data, and, sometimes, sneaky methods of making you think a solicitation is an airmail letter from a friend in Europe.

Some New York charities, like Covenant House and Hale House, have turned for help to a Massachusetts direct-mail company called Epsilon. Tony Mayo, Epsilon's senior director of fund-raising and membership services, explained that by sending out thousands of test letters his company tries to determine what color envelope works best for a particular mailing, whether envelopes should be stamped or metered, whether a celebrity sponsor may work for a particular charity. "The whole purpose is to get the envelope opened," Mayo said. "We may use a handwritten font to draw the reader in. Or sometimes a plain envelope, which makes people think, Oh, who is it from? Of course, that can backfire—they might feel tricked." Nothing is easily predicted, not even the effect of a celebrity sponsor's name and "signature." When an AIDS charity made several changes to its mailing, including the addition of an endorsement by the Olympic diver Greg Louganis, responses declined. When Hugh Downs endorsed UNICEF, responses skyrocketed. "You just never know," Mayo said.

Covenant House sends out about five hundred thousand newsletters a month to donors, some of which come with a computer-generated Post-it note attached, for warmth ("Your help is urgently needed this month"). Smaller charities, like the American Suicide Foundation, send out mailings of only a few thousand letters at a time, each affixed with the machine-generated signature of Joan Rivers, an honorary director.

An amazing amount of time goes into that piece of holiday junk mail that you might automatically throw away. Here's a typical case. Last month, fifty thousand New Yorkers received a mailing from the Bowery Mission, a group of four shelters for homeless men and women. Administrators for the shelters began planning this mailing nearly two years ago, when they hired Hemmings, Birkholm & Grizzard, a California direct-mail company. A team of five flew to New York and convened a focus group to figure out how best to approach the locals. The group yielded two important conclusions, according to Randy Brewer, a vice-president of the company. "We found out that New Yorkers do care and want to help those in need, and then they told us, 'Don't give us tricks, just tell us what we need to know,' " he said.

Back in L. A., the company consulted a package-design expert, who came up with a plain brown legal-size envelope with an old-fashioned etching of a turkey on the front, above the boldly typed announcement "Thanksgiving Dinner for $1.79!" Inside, there was a faux newspaper clipping—a story on the Mission—and, of course, a pitch letter. Brewer envisions his piece of direct mail engaging potential donors in a conversation right at the mailbox. "The package says, 'Cheap, off the shelf, efficient.' It says, 'A bag of groceries—you know, Thanksgiving,' " he said. The phony clip, in a newspaper typeface, implied credibility. And the text on the envelope hinted of a bargain, when, really, "$1.79" was the cost to the Mission of each Thanksgiving dinner; the letter proposed that recipients donate a dozen or so meals for homeless people. After a year of tests, the design yielded a 2.3-per-cent response rate among new donors, a smashing success by charity direct-mail standards. Knowing it had a hit on its hands, the Mission authorized the fifty-thousand-piece mailing this year.

Direct mail rarely pays for itself right away, but anyone who responds

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERIC PALMA

becomes part of the donor list, which can be used again and again. Of course, nearly every charity that uses direct mail receives angry feedback from people who think the pleas look too expensive. "We get a lot of letters back saying, 'Don't waste so much money on fancy mailings,' " Rod Malloy, of the Mission, said. "My answer to that is, if people would volunteer and serve a meal and experience it in person, sixty to eighty per cent of those people would become donors for life, and we wouldn't need direct mail anymore."

## CHINA FINDS RELIGION

THE unlikely image of Li Peng, the dour Premier of the People's Republic of China, trekking across Tibet astride a shaggy yak and wearing a yellow-fringed monk's bonnet came irrepressibly to mind last week when Chinese Communist Party leaders substituted a six-year-old child of their own choosing for the one who had been sanctified by the Dalai Lama as the reincarnation of the tenth Panchen Lama, Tibet's second-most-important monk. Soon after the Panchen Lama's death, in 1989, the abbot from Tashi Lhunpo, the Panchen Lama's home monastery, began a search for his replacement. According to Tibetan Buddhist custom, after a wait of several years for the consciousness of a departed *trulku*, or "reincarnation of a high lama," to appear in mortal form, a clerical search committee is appointed and then, guided by dreams, omens, oracles, and prophetic visions, sets off to find the child in whose corporeal form the departed consciousness has been reborn.

Since the People's Liberation Army's occupation of Lhasa, in 1959, the Communist Party has suppressed all such arcane practices as "feudal" and "reactionary," and it has been difficult for the Buddhists to undertake the search for reincarnations. As a result, most monasteries have been left without replacements for their most important religious figures. When Party leaders grudgingly approved the quest for the new Panchen Lama, their intention was to keep firm control of the process. They were therefore infuriated when the list of candidates, instead of being passed directly on to Beijing for approval, was evidently leaked by the search committee to the exiled Dalai Lama, who, exercising one of his traditional religious prerogatives, designated Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the six-year-old son of a Nagqu District herdsman, as the next Panchen Lama. "Recognition of the reincarnation is a religious matter, and not political," the Dalai Lama declared. "It is my hope that the Chinese government will extend its understanding, coöperation, and assistance."

Instead, Party leaders condemned his choice, took the young Gedhun into custody, detained the abbot of Tashi Lhunpo, and then dragooned seventy-five hapless Tibetan Buddhist leaders into rushing to Beijing. Once there, they were lectured by President Jiang Zemin, forced to reject the Dalai Lama's choice as a "fraud," and compelled to prepare another list of children—from which a new candidate would be chosen by lot in Lhasa—for submission directly to the State Council and Premier Li Peng.

The idea that the premier of an atheistic "people's republic"—a Soviet-trained hydroelectric engineer who is best known for his decision to order martial law against student demonstrators in 1989—should become involved in one of the more mystical practices of Tibetan Buddhism is, of course, ludicrous. But because Beijing's actions risk provoking the kind of pro-independence demonstrations that have so often rocked Tibet in the past, they are also extremely dangerous. Tibetans have repeatedly risked imprisonment, forced labor, torture, and even execution by taking to the streets against their Chinese overlords. Yet in doing so, as the Dalai Lama lamented when he was awarded the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize, "they are facing the real possibility of elimination as a people and a nation."

With the exiled Dalai Lama unable to intervene on behalf of his people and with Communist Party leaders unwilling even to talk with him about compromise, Tibetans are left confronting a painful paradox: while most countries lack leaders of real moral stature, they have a leader with enormous stature but no country. If China's policies don't change, Tibet may soon be without a functioning religion and a culture as well.

## NEWS STANDOFF

ON November 1st, the Senate Minority Whip, Wendell Ford, Democrat from Kentucky, was chatting with the voters on WHAS-AM, in Louisville. Ford and a caller got into a discussion about the Democrats' contention that the Republicans' proposed tax cuts would unfairly benefit the wealthy. The caller, who was defending the Republican position and was apparently sensitive to the perception that he himself might be one of those plutocrats the G.O.P. was seeking to enrich, said to Ford, "I'm not near as rich as yourself, Senator."

"Well, I'm not nigger rich, either," Ford rejoined.

"I said 'not near as rich as you,' " the caller said.

Later, Ford issued a statement, which WHAS aired: "I thought the caller used an offensive racial epithet. I was so shocked and offended that I shot back at him, and I repeated what I thought the caller said to emphasize how offensive it was."

This seems to be in pretty much the same league of the lame as the House Majority Leader Dick Armey's "stumbled word" defense last January, when he referred to the Democratic representative Barney Frank as "Barney Fag." It is undoubtedly true that Ford thought he heard the slur. But on some level, at least, Ford's rejoinder was simply the rebuttal of an accusation. The idea that he was prompted to repeat the slur "to emphasize how offensive it was" is arguably *more* laughable than Armey's slip-of-the-tongue defense.

What is interesting is the difference in press play accorded these two incidents. The Barney Frank slur made the front page of the Washington *Post* and was the subject of an editorial in the *Times*, which declared, "Mr. Armey has now won a permanent place in the annals of Congressional disrepute." A Nexis search finds four hundred and thirty-three citations over all, including a hundred and forty-four mentions in newspapers and twenty-three in magazines. The slur received coverage on all the major network news broadcasts. By contrast, Senator Ford's use of what is supposed to be the most unpardonable of all slurs made the front page of no national newspaper (although the Washington *Post* did run a brief item on page six), inspired no editorial-page denunciations in the national press, and received no network news coverage. Nexis reveals only eleven mentions in total, and all but the one in the *Post* were in local papers.

This suggests a new law of politics: Bias cancels bias. That is, when a politician makes a remark the bias of which conforms with the bias of the press toward that politician, it is news. When the politician's bias contrasts with the bias of the press toward the politician, it is not. The one bias has cancelled the other, and nothing is left—apart from, of course, the faint, lingering odor of hypocrisy.

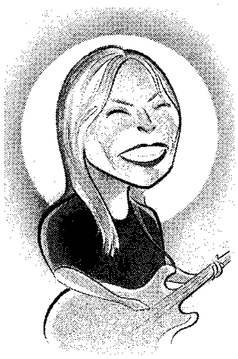
## BIRTHDAY SUITE

One recent evening, Joni Mitchell, whose autobiographical lyrics and jazz-inflected acoustic guitar are largely responsible for folk music's staying power, celebrated her fifty-second birthday with what she called "an informal open rehearsal" at Fez, the downtown watering hole. Mitchell's appearance was not announced in the press. Ten hours before she had decided to perform, after a twelve-year absence from touring and just an hour after she informed Ellen Cavolina, who books the acts at Fez, of her decision ("I played for a group of seventy-year-old intellectuals at the Waldorf-Astoria last night; tonight I want to do something different," she said), word of Mitchell's impromptu concert spread throughout Manhattan. "When I heard she was performing, my whole *body* filled up with this . . . Joni feeling," Katherine Dieckmann, a *Village Voice* writer, said as she waited in line. "I almost passed out. Joni's been incredible for thirty years."

Of some two hundred fans who gathered in the dark, cavernous space where Mitchell was to perform, many were women, including the novelist Susan Minot; the Pretenders' lead singer, Chrissie Hynde; Carly Simon; and Natalie Merchant. Hynde, who was sitting in a banquette, raised her hands in the air as Mitchell made her way to the stage. "Let it out, Joni!" she shouted. Mitchell smiled, strapped a green guitar across her chest, and bowed.

She looked like any number of her photographs: long blond hair with bangs, long pallid face, equine mouth. On a stand to Mitchell's right, there was a vase filled with sunflowers, which evoked van Gogh, one of Mitchell's favorite painters; in fact, the cover of her latest album, "Turbulent Indigo," executed in oil, is a self-portrait with a bandaged ear. "I have this little house in Canada," she told the audience, rubbing her right hand against her black-jeaned thigh. "And there's this man who looks after my land. He's a melody man. He hums all the time, like my grandmother did. He thinks Frank Sinatra is an amateur. He said to me, 'Joni, I know you're not sad like you are in your songs all the time. Write me something different.' " Mitchell smiled her muted Stan Laurel-like smile. "I sat on a rock and tried to tune my guitar to the sound of squawking birds near the sea. I tried to write a happy song, but it didn't turn out that way." Mitchell then began to sing "The Magdalene Laundries," which is about discrimination against single women in Ireland in the early part of this century.

During certain songs, Mitchell rocked her hips back and forth, in a modified version of the Elvis swivel. Between songs, the only sound besides Mitchell's voice and the audience's applause was Chrissie Hynde intermittently shouting, "Let it out, Joni!" When Carly Simon, who was seated in the booth beside Hynde's, asked her to stop, Hynde held Simon tightly around the neck, pointed to Mitchell, and stage-whispered, "That's a *real* singer up there."



*Joni Mitchell*

"Why don't you have another drink, Chrissie?" a male member of the audience yelled to Hynde after Mitchell completed "Turbulent Indigo" and moments before Simon picked up her coat and left. Hynde ignored everyone except Joni Mitchell. She cheered, "Happy birthday, Joni!" Mitchell looked out into the audience and bowed again. The audience began singing "Happy Birthday." Looking pleased and slightly embarrassed, Mitchell said, "The one good thing about this birthday thing is that I don't have to say I'm fifty-one and a half anymore." She paused and strummed a few chords on her guitar. "Maybe I've made it."

## THE BATTLE OF THE RADIO BANDS

It was midmorning in the WBLS studio, on Park Avenue, and Frankie Crocker was sitting with two cohorts, fine-tuning a battle plan. "We have to get our creative juices flowing," Crocker said in his normal voice, which is low-key and conversational. A trim, delicate-featured man wearing a single earring and dandyishly baggy pin-striped trousers, Crocker stood in front of three microphones and began a run-through of his routine. "We're going to awaken the sleeping giant," Crocker intoned. "Come on, giant! We need you. We're ready! Who's going to ride with us? We're on our way!"

Whether the sleeping giant that Crocker referred to was WBLS or himself (he has just returned to the station as program director) wasn't clear, but Crocker's tone of comic pugnacity was. With Crocker's return, the latest New York radio war, among the city's three main R. & B. stations, goes public. Radio wars are usually full of juice and sizzle, and this one appears to be no exception.

In the seventies and early eighties, with Crocker as d.j., WBLS coasted to No. 1. Crocker's own career hit a speed bump when he figured in the payola investigations of the mid-nineteen-seventies, but in the end he only pleaded guilty to a tax misdemeanor. He paid a twenty-five-hundred-dollar fine, and until he left to do some TV work, in 1993, both he and WBLS continued their reign.

"We were targeted toward the eighteen-to-thirty-four crowd," said Oliver Sutton, the station manager and a nephew of the sometime mayoral candidate Percy Sutton. The playlist included R. & B.—both oldies and contemporary—and some rap. "But not offensive rap," Sutton said. "We have a policy." The station's main competitor in the youth market was Hot 97, or WQHT, which is owned by Emmis, a well-heeled Indianapolis corporation, but Sutton didn't think much of Hot 97's musical diet. "Murder, drugs, sex. They play it all," he said. "They're not socially conscious." Last year, the Hoosiers snapped up another New York station—WRKS, better known as KISS-FM—and it soon switched to a black-oldies format, hiring Nick Ashford and Valerie Simpson as afternoon d.j.s.

"It was a rousing success," Sutton says. "They sucked up a lot of what we call our P1 audience—our platinum audience, our constant listeners. We were used to having 1.2 to 1.5 million on a daily basis. I think we ended up at one point with less than a million. In order to play the new mega-merger game, we would have to outflank them and buy another FM station. There are none for sale in New York City, and even if there were the price would be phenomenal. I think Emmis paid sixty-eight million dollars for KISS, and the prices have gone up since then." Caught in a classic squeeze, Sutton came up with a "cohesive plan," a plum part of which was the return of Frankie Crocker.

"It wasn't a war. It was more like a slaughter. We were assaulted, attacked, and raided," Crocker said of the Emmis one-two punch. He sounded exhilarated. Would KISS be taking preventive measures? "Probably. Knowing them. They know where our Zip Codes are, where our strong audience is," Crocker said, adding, "I love what I do. I love getting in the ring with the champ. I've *been* the champ."

*Frankie Crocker*

Back in the studio, Crocker said, "There's no comedy, and we need comedy. We need vignettes." Which meant it was time to assemble the Voices—a motley crew of WBLS d.j.s, among them a hefty fellow whose voice seemed to well up from an undersea chamber, two women, and a man in a Kangol cap named Flash who, as Grandmaster Flash, was one of the progenitors of rap. They began to put together a skit, which at one point included a flushing sound—a rude jab at an opponent in the radio wars.

Oliver Sutton strode in, like a diplomat into a war zone. "Ah! Scatology," he said, and strode out again. Crocker's voice, a tremendous instrument, was now at its fullest. "It's these things that help make radio fun again," he exulted. Then he asked, ruminatively, "When am I going to have time to listen to some music?"

## HOMAGE TO FAULKNER

Newt Gingrich looks for angry
votes;
Ergo, he hammers welfare folks.
There lie his Presidential hopes:
Apotheosis of the Snopes.

—NORMAN MAILER

## RETRACING THEIR STEPS

THIRTY years after the Metropolitan Opera played its last season at the old house, at Thirty-ninth and Broadway, forty men and women who danced in the ballet corps at the "yellow brewery" held a reunion. Over drinks in the bar at the Broadway Grill, a cheerful retro-modern restaurant in the Crowne Plaza hotel, the ensemble rose from ebullience to exhilaration amid hugs, kisses, and cries of recognition: "He was my partner in 'Traviata'!" "We haven't seen each other for years, but it feels like last week."

None of those in the room looked nearly as old as, by rational calculation, they must be. Natasha Kelepovska, the senior member of the corps, has gray hair, but her slender figure and erect, supple posture are anything but antique. The party's nearest approach to a father figure was the choreographer Zachary Solov, a burly man who looks limber enough to move pianos. Carole Dioguardi, a pert blonde who wears immense horn-rimmed glasses that suggest a child playing teacher, commented, "We all know what we're all doing, but we wanted to see each other."

A photographer who had been snapping throughout the cocktail hour followed the party when it was herded into the dining room, and Nancy Zeckendorf, a petite, sweet-faced woman (she is a trustee of the Santa Fe Opera), announced, "Dame Alicia telephoned from London this morning. She sends love and asks for pictures." During dinner, each guest was asked to stand and say a few words. "Gold" and "golden" kept recurring. Their time at the Met was "a golden era." The voices were "gold" (guests call out singers' names: "Bjoerling!" "Tebaldi!" "Rysanek!"), and the acoustics were "golden." Marian Horosko, who is an editor at *Dance Magazine*, called the nineteen-fifties "a golden time for all the arts in New York." She added, "The city's too expensive now. Dance schools close because they can't pay the rent. Students can't afford to live here."

Nancy Zeckendorf said, "Most of us didn't go to college. We got our education at the Met." Someone said, "If you learn to present yourself on the stage of the Metropolitan, you can present yourself on any stage in the world," and another said, "I lived for those six minutes in 'Gioconda,' " and someone else boasted, "I have a son in the Joffrey." Several people told why they left the company: Hans Meister, a quiet, brown-haired man, who is Swiss and teaches in Switzerland, left to dance with the Kirov, and Bruce Marks, a husky man with a bushy black beard, who is the artistic director of the Boston Ballet, went to the American Ballet Theatre and then to the Royal Danish Ballet as a principal dancer. Diana Feingold, who administers the dance division at Juilliard, went on to raise a family.

Conversation outlasted the champagne. There was a lot to say, because everyone was using the shared past in the present, and the reunion wasn't just about yesterday. Feingold reflected, "Dancers never think something's too hard. They're always ready to take the next step. But I've never seen anything like the technical capacity of young dancers nowadays." And Marks said, "I'm trying to pass on to my company and my school everything I learned from all of you." ♦

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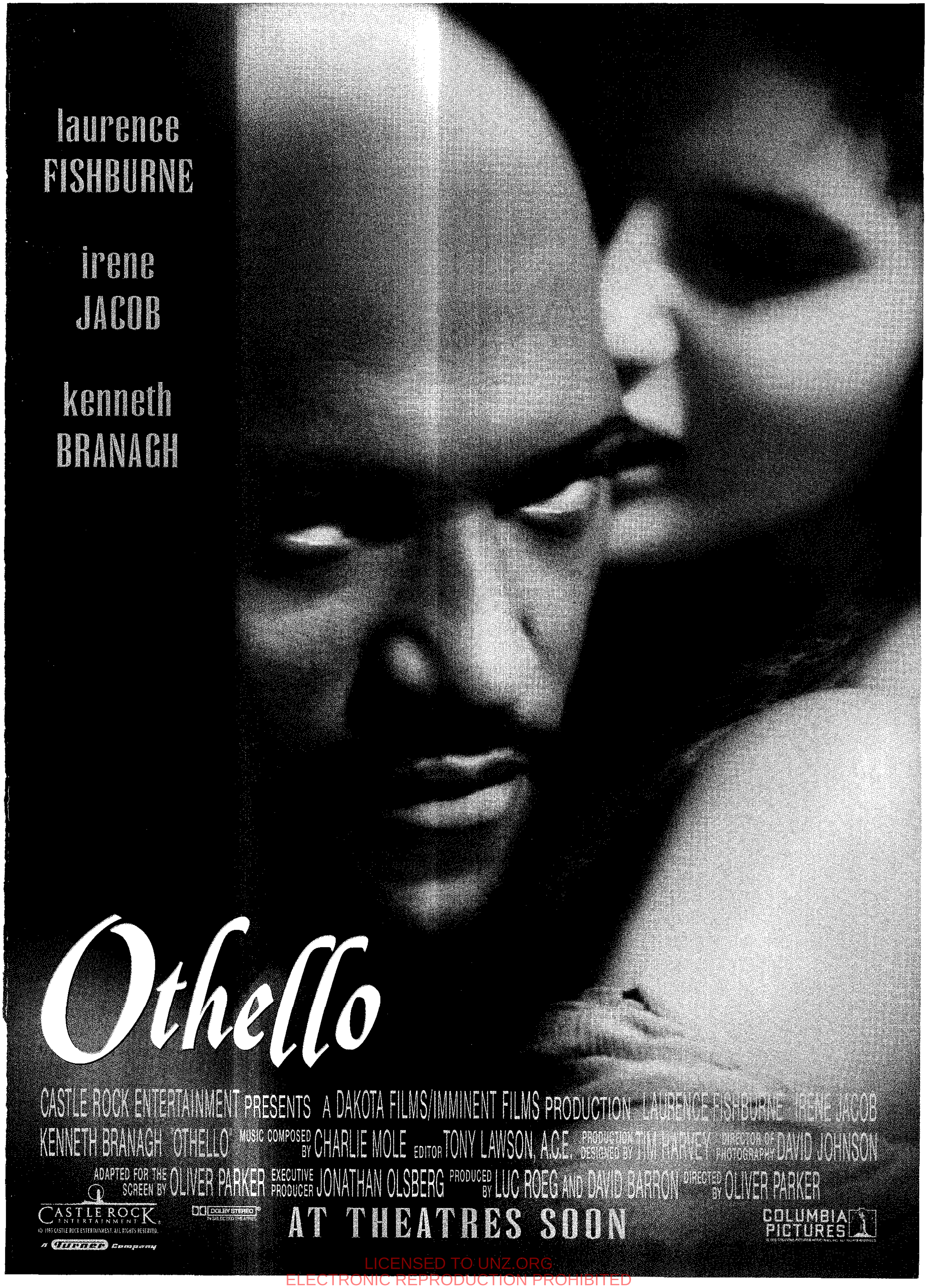
*"The Envelope Pleas," Warren St. John; "China Finds Religion," Orville Schell; "News Standoff," Michael Kelly; "Birthday Suite," Hilton Als; "The Battle of the Radio Bands," Anthony Haden-Guest; "Retracing Their Steps," Naomi Bliven.*



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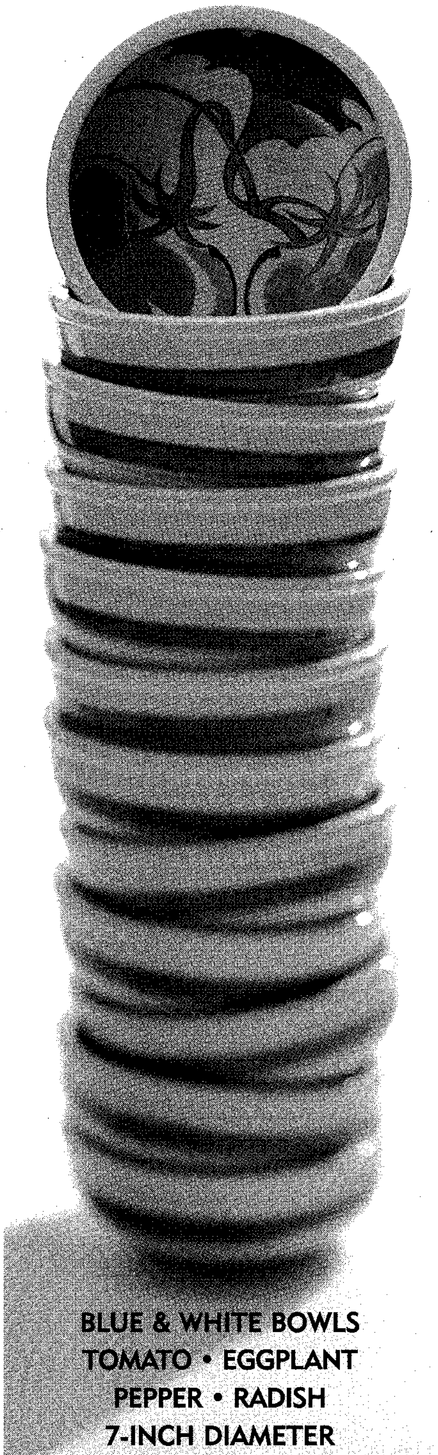

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THE WORLD OF BUSINESS

# KIRK'S ENTERPRISE

*What is Kirk Kerkorian, the reclusive Las Vegas billionaire, up to at Chrysler? A look at the curious deals in his past may provide some clues.*

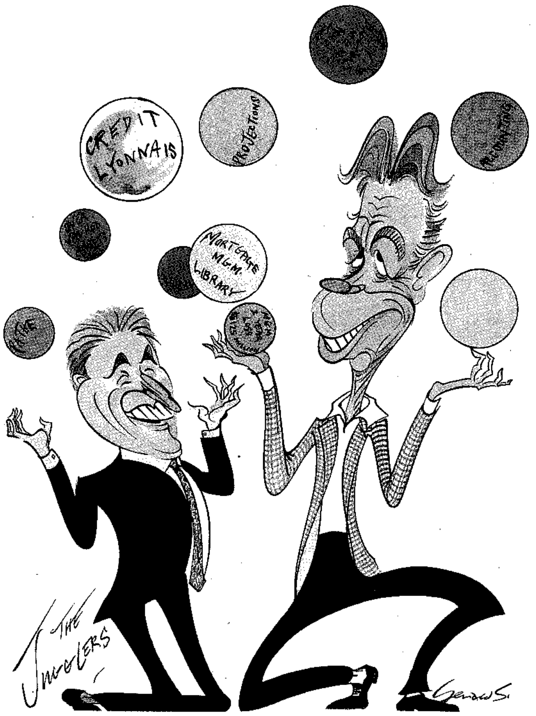
BY JOHN CASSIDY

A WIRY seventy-eight-year-old man stood quietly in the corner of Las Vegas's Golden Gloves gymnasium one afternoon not long ago watching Mike Tyson work up a sweat. As Tyson unleashed stinging combinations to the body and face of a sparring partner, the old man's thoughts may have drifted back to his youth, when he won twenty-nine out of thirty-three fights on the Los Angeles amateur circuit. In those days, he was an impoverished son of Armenian immigrants and fought under the name Rifle Right Kirk.

That was sixty years ago. Now Kirk Kerkorian is a billionaire. He hires boxers like Tyson to promote his MGM Grand, the world's largest casino-hotel complex. A half century of deals have transported him from the poverty-stricken streets of East Los Angeles to the No. 31 spot on the Forbes 400; the magazine estimates his net worth at $2.7 billion. In April, Kerkorian surprised the business world by launching a hostile-takeover bid for the Chrysler Corporation. The bid failed—it would have cost nearly $23 billion, and the nation's major banks refused to finance it—but Kerkorian didn't go away. He owns 13.6 per cent of Chrysler's common stock and is now demanding a seat on the board for his representative, Jerome York.

Despite his great wealth and his regular appearances in the business pages, Kerkorian remains an elusive figure. He has not given a press interview since 1971, and his appearance at the Tyson sparring session was an extremely rare public outing. His aversion to publicity evokes memories of another Las Vegas billionaire, Howard Hughes. Aides say that Kerkorian's privacy is just a personal foible. "What Kirk's privacy hides is what a decent and generous person he is," said Stephen Fraidin, a senior partner at Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson, who is representing Kerkorian in the Chrysler battle. That may be so—Kerkorian recently pledged part of his Chrysler stake to a charitable foundation he controls—but his Garboesque tactics also help divert attention from a long career that has often been controversial. At various times over the years, he has been accused of holding corporations for ransom, reneging on written promises, dealing with gangsters, and wrecking a legendary Hollywood studio.

Kerkorian's rags-to-riches story is interesting in itself, and it also serves to illustrate a broader point about the free-



*In 1990, Kerkorian (right) sold MGM/UA to the over-ambitious Giancarlo Parretti. Even by Hollywood standards, it was an unusual arrangement.*

GERALD SCARFE

market system in which he has thrived. It is a textbook example of how what Keynes termed the "casino" economy can bestow great rewards on those who play skillfully, regardless of their sex, race, or social background; but it also demonstrates that organizing the world like a casino can have its drawbacks.

The most persistent charge against Kerkorian is that he preys upon the companies he invests in. The accusation has resurfaced in the battle for Chrysler—a sprawling industrial giant with more than a hundred and twenty-five thousand employees and annual revenues of $52 billion. "I think what Kerkorian is doing at Chrysler is totally destructive and totally against what American industry needs," Felix Rohatyn, the veteran Wall Street financier, said. "It is a very short-term attempt to destabilize a company at the expense of its long-term interests." The crux of the dispute is Chrysler's cash holdings—$6.4 billion. Kerkorian's representatives say that Chrysler is in better shape than ever and can afford to hand out some of the cash to its rightful owners—shareholders like Kerkorian. Chrysler argues that, given its history of near-death experiences, the firm needs all that cash and more to carry it through the next economic downturn. In 1980-81, of course, President Jimmy Carter and Congress considered the company's fate sufficiently important to guarantee up to $1.5 billion of the firm's loans, thereby helping it avoid bankruptcy.

"If there is anything that American industry has learned, it is the need for a strong capital structure to allow companies to see through recessions and invest heavily in research and product development," said Rohatyn, who was one of Chrysler's financial advisers in the federal bailout. "To force a company that has made a great effort to become competitive and strengthen its position to start a partial liquidation process in order to give the shareholders a short-term profit is, I think, totally counterproductive."

The Chrysler battle has consumed acres of newsprint, but another instance in which Kerkorian has recently been accused of damaging a company to further his own interests has received little attention. It concerns his sale, in November of 1990, of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer/United Artists, the Hollywood film studio, to Pathé Communications Corporation, a company then controlled by the

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colorful Italian financier Giancarlo Parretti, for $1.3 billion.

The sale of MGM to Pathé netted Kerkorian a billion dollars, but just five months after it took place the merged company was forced into bankruptcy court. Subsequently, MGM and Crédit Lyonnais, the state-controlled French bank that financed Parretti, filed lawsuits against, among others, Kerkorian in a California state court, claiming that the 1990 sale was a fraudulent transaction, which stripped MGM/UA of its most valuable assets and left the merged company in hopelessly bad shape. These cases were dismissed, but Crédit Lyonnais appealed the rulings and filed a further suit in federal court, requesting damages of $750 million.

Kerkorian's lawyers countersued, and vowed to fight Crédit Lyonnais all the way, but early this October they quietly reversed course and reached a confidential settlement. According to a Bloomberg Business News story, Kerkorian, while making no admission of liability, agreed to settle all outstanding litigation and pay the French bank $125 million—a figure that raised suspicions on Wall Street that he didn't want any embarrassing details of the MGM/UA saga to emerge during the Chrysler battle. However, Alex Yemenidjian, a longtime Kerkorian aide, who is the president and chief operating officer of MGM Grand, Inc., vociferously denied that his boss had anything to hide, or that he had paid Crédit Lyonnais anything like the reported $125 million. "That number is ridiculous," Yemenidjian said. "Whoever came up with it either does not have any knowledge of this transaction or is purposely trying to tarnish Mr. Kerkorian's reputation. We settled because there comes a point in everyone's life when you are better off settling and moving on." A spokesman for Crédit Lyonnais refused to comment on the settlement, citing the confidentiality agreement, but another person close to the bank claimed that the amount Kerkorian had agreed to pay was indeed more than $100 million.

Contradictory accounts of events are recurring features of Kerkorian's career, and so are disputes over signed agreements. "He seems to view a written contract as the beginning of a negotiation," said Fay Vincent, the former baseball commissioner, who once had a bitter run-in with Kerkorian. Ray Stark, the Hollywood producer, has compared doing business with Kerkorian to negotiating with Howard Hughes, and added that he had found Hughes far more straightforward.

Kerkorian's defenders readily affirm that he is a fearsome negotiator. "He's a very tough man to do business with, but that's all part of his personality—I can't say he was ever dishonest when I was around him," said Alan Ladd, Jr., who was a senior executive at MGM/UA from 1983 to 1988. Ladd resigned after he discovered that Kerkorian had tried to bring in the hot-shot producers Peter Guber and Jon Peters without telling him.

Kerkorian was always a hard fighter. His grandfather emigrated to California from Armenia in the eighteen-eighties, bought a small farm in the San Joaquin Valley, and then sent for his teen-age son. In the nineteen-twenties, Kerkorian's father lost his land and had to move his family to East Los Angeles. There the young Kerkorian acquired a reputation as something of a troublemaker and attended what he later called a "semi reform school." Eventually, he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps, the New Deal make-work program for unemployed youths.

During his stint as an amateur boxer, Kerkorian did a series of odd jobs, including, as it happens, working as a laborer at MGM. The turning point in his life came in the late nineteen-thirties, when he developed a passion for flying. He went to night school, and when war broke out he became an instructor in the Army Air Forces. By 1945, when he was in his late twenties, he was flying missions around Europe and Africa for the Royal Air Force Transport Command.

After the war, Kerkorian went into the business of buying and selling war-surplus airplanes. In 1948, he founded a single-aircraft charter firm that flew gamblers between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, and over the next twenty years he built this operation, which he grandly named Trans International Airlines, into a substantial company. In 1968, he sold the business to Transamerica Corporation in a stock deal that eventually made him more than $100 million.

Kerkorian was by then also branching out into Las Vegas casinos, and had become a noted craps player. In 1967, he bought the old Flamingo Hotel, which

## GOD TO THE SERPENT

Beloved Snake, perhaps my finest blueprint,
How can I not take pride in your design?
Your passage without hoof or paw or shoe print
Revels in art's and nature's S-curve line.

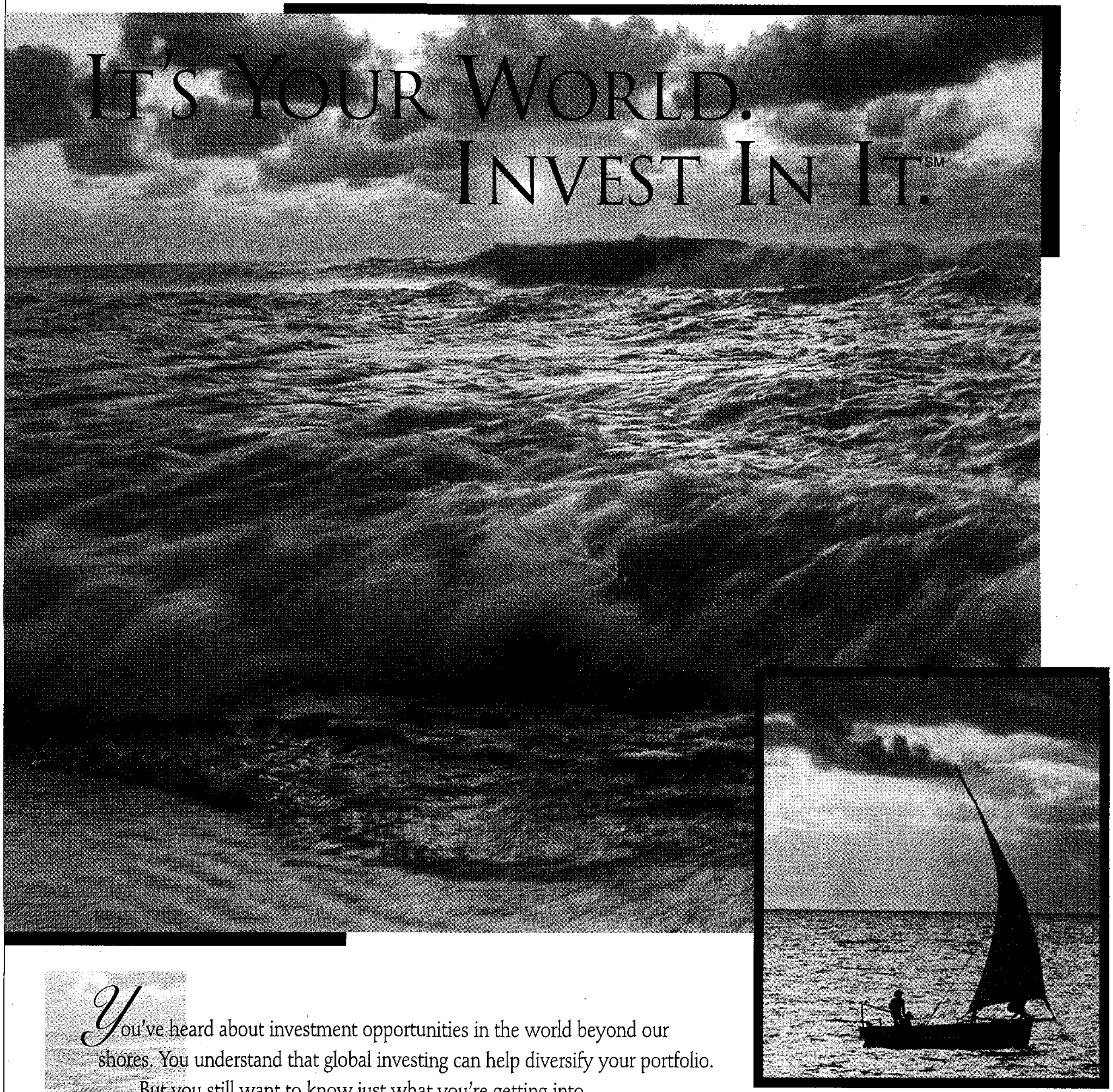
No ears, no whiskers, fingers, legs, or teeth,
No cries, complaints, or curses from you start;
But silence shares your body in its sheath,
Full-functioning with no superfluous part.

Men try to emulate your forkéd tongue,
Their prideful prick dwarfed by your lordly length.
Two arms for blows or hugging loosely hung
Are mocked by Boa Constrictor's single strength.

How dare men claim their image as my own,
With all those limbs and features sticking out?
You, Snake, with continuity of bone
Need but a spine to coil and cruise about.

Men fear the force of your hypnotic eyes,
Make myths to damn your being wise and deft.
You, Snake, not men, deserve my cosmic prize.
I'm glad you stayed in Eden when they left.

—Virginia Hamilton Adair



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had been built by Bugsy Siegel, and a year later he himself started to build the International, which became the biggest casino in Las Vegas and was the first one designed for the convention business.

His growing reputation took a knock in January of 1970, when the New York State Joint Legislative Committee on Crime played a 1961 police-surveillance tape on which he was heard promising to mail a check for $21,300 to one Charlie (the Blade) Tourine, a reputed enforcer in the Genovese crime family. Bizarrely, Kerkorian's check was to be made out to a George Raft—presumably the actor—because, Tourine's voice said, "he has connections and can get it through without my signature." Kerkorian was heard warning Tourine not to sign the check himself, because "there's a lot of heat around."

The tape's contents created a stir on Wall Street. In response, Kerkorian issued a statement saying he had "never knowingly had any association or business dealings with any criminal organization." As for the conversation with Tourine, who had been convicted of bootlegging and illegal gambling, it related to "payment of a wager or wagers on sporting events and nothing more."

The statement amounted to an admission that Kerkorian had bets with Mob bookmakers—a scandalous but unsurprising revelation from a man who had been rumored to bet fifty thousand dollars a night at the craps table. What was surprising, *Forbes* reported, was a suggestion that Tourine had tried to arrange a $5-million airplane loan for Kerkorian during the early nineteen-sixties. "I talked to people all across the country about that loan. I can't say whether I talked to Tourine or not," Kerkorian told Forbes in 1971.

The *Forbes* article, which ran that December, contained what has turned out to be Kerkorian's valedictory press interview. Though Kerkorian had assured the reporters that he was "as clean as a whistle," *Forbes* learned that MGM, which Kerkorian had acquired a thirty-nine-per-cent interest in, was planning to buy some property in Las Vegas from a group that included Moe Dalitz, a figure the magazine described as a "former kingpin of the Cleveland Syndicate." On being asked about this deal, Kerkorian explained, "We need more land for the hotel site, and these people happen to own it. I don't see anything wrong with buying a piece of vacant property from these people. What's wrong with Moe?"

The Mafia stories prompted the *Wall Street Journal* to make inquiries about Kerkorian, but it turned up nothing untoward. "Authoritative sources say Mr. Kerkorian is a clean businessman," the *Journal* reported. "Investigators interviewed by phone in New York, Washington, Las Vegas and Los Angeles who have a direct knowledge of the Mafia say there isn't any evidence of business ties between Mr. Kerkorian and the underworld figures."

It was the cash from the Transamerica deal that enabled Kerkorian to invest in Hollywood, and he acquired his interest in MGM in 1969. The once legendary studio had recently hit a sticky patch but was still a formidable presence. Kerkorian stayed in the film business for twenty years, adding United Artists to MGM in 1981. An entertaining version of his Hollywood sojourn has been recounted in the 1990 book "Fade Out," by Peter Bart, who worked at MGM/UA in the nineteen-eighties. It depicts Kerkorian's reign there as a black comedy, featuring an endless procession of management purges and financial U-turns. "I signed on to a hallucinogenic roller-coaster ride during which I would witness not the long-awaited renaissance of MGM, but rather its utter and complete devastation," Bart wrote. "Kerkorian, ever the savvy Las Vegas gameplayer, had evolved a scheme of his own to harness Hollywood's myth-making machinery to serve his personal objectives. The end result: Kerkorian emerged a billionaire. His companies emerged as shambles."

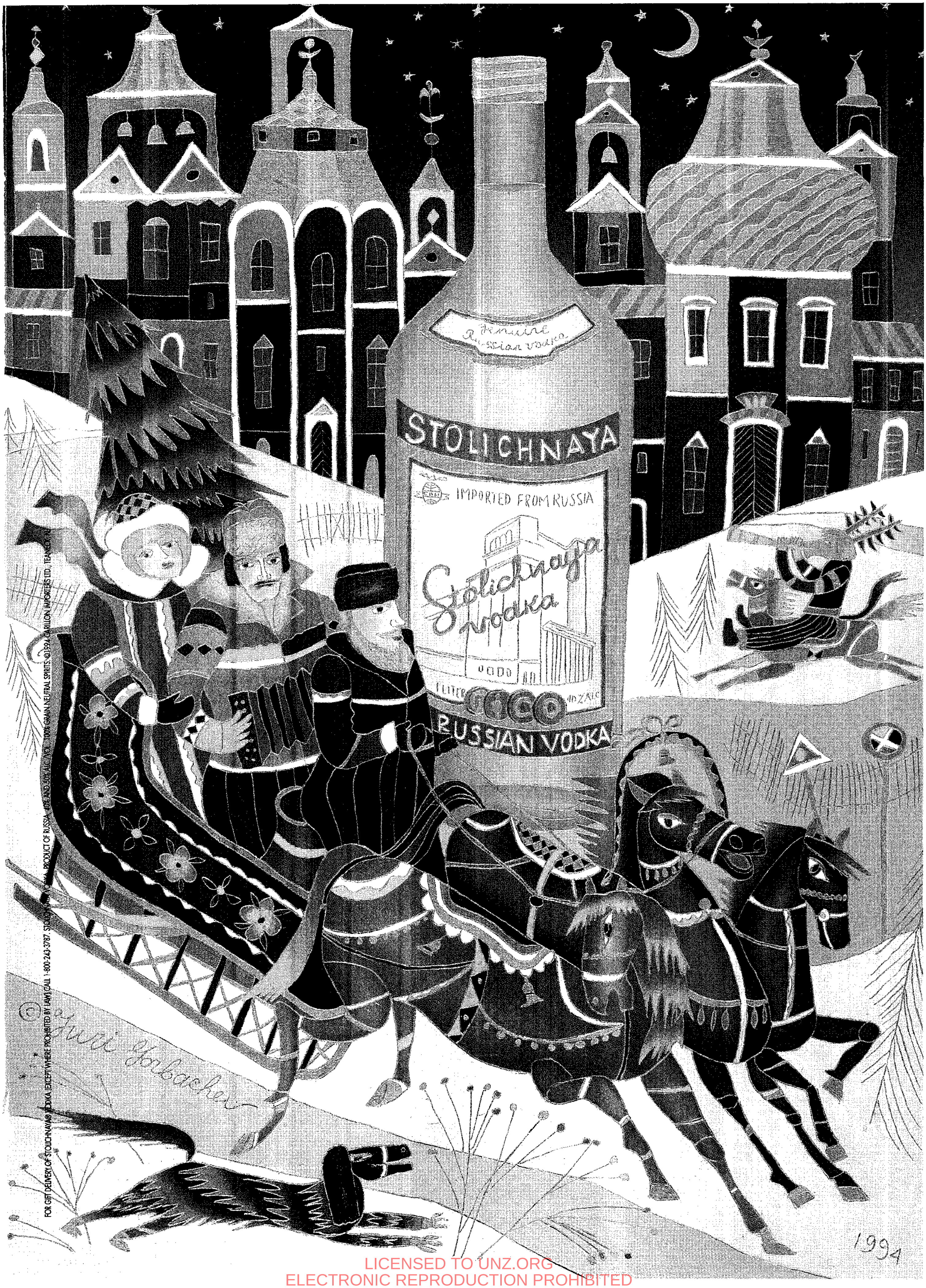
In one early episode related by Bart, Kerkorian's managers liquidated most of MGM's physical assets, including part of the famous Culver City film lot; a third of the lot was sold for $7.2 million. A series of auctions was held to sell off the clothes and props that had been featured in some of MGM's most storied titles, such as the Tarzan movies and "Meet Me in St. Louis." Judy Garland's shoes from "The Wizard of Oz" went for seventy-five hundred dollars each.

In addition to stripping MGM of its assets, Kerkorian also found time for other investments. His first play was at the now defunct Western Air Lines, in which he had acquired a twenty-eight-per-cent stake in 1968. He sold some of his shares over the years, and in 1976 Western agreed to buy out his remaining stake, of 16.5 per cent, for $30.3 million, which was about eighteen per cent above the market price.

Alex Yemenidjian, Kerkorian's spokesman, vehemently denied that this transaction was a form of greenmail. There is no precise definition of this Wall Street term, but it usually refers to a situation in which an investor buys a stake in a company and causes so much trouble that the management eventually agrees to buy his shares at a premium just to be rid of him. "Kirk wanted to sell his stock in the open market, but he couldn't because the company had a first right of refusal to buy his stake," Yemenidjian said. "He had no choice but to offer it to the company first. Do you call that greenmail? I don't."

A more detailed version of these events is contained in a Western Air Lines proxy statement from March of 1976. The statement says that Kerkorian told the board that he had two possible buyers for his stake, one a potential Western competitor, and made it clear that he was determined to sell out above the market price. "On November 28, 1975, and on several occasions thereafter Mr. Kerkorian informed the management of the Company that it was his definite intention to sell his block of 2,508,832 shares at a premium of 25 per cent over market," the statement said.

After his profitable excursion on Western Air Lines, Kerkorian turned his attention to Columbia Pictures, whose share price was sagging because of an embezzlement scandal involving David Begelman, the former president of its filmmaking division. "I think Kerkorian perceived that Columbia was vulnerable after the Begelman scandal," said Fay Vincent, Columbia's president and C.E.O. at the time. In October of 1978, Kerkorian bought a 5.5-per-cent stake. Just a month later, he launched a tender offer for an additional twenty per cent of Columbia's shares, saying that he wanted to become a "partner" of management. A takeover offer seemed likely. In December, though, Kerkorian placated Vincent and Wall Street by signing a "standstill agreement" with Columbia, in which he promised not to boost his stake beyond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25.5 per cent or to seek control for at least three years. In return, Columbia said it would "consult" with Kerkorian.

That seemed to resolve matters, but in September of 1980 Kerkorian sued Columbia, claiming that its directors had breached the agreement, and announced that he intended to buy more stock after all. Vincent, a former official at the Securities and Exchange Commission, was outraged. Columbia filed its own suit within days, alleging that Kerkorian was secretly conspiring with Nelson Bunker Hunt, the Texas oilman, to gain control of the company. "We were disappointed with both his word and his contract," recalled Herbert Allen, Jr., the financier, who was a Columbia board member and a major shareholder (and was also sued by Kerkorian).

The dispute was finally resolved in February, 1981, when Columbia's management agreed to buy Kerkorian's shares, for about fifty-five dollars a share—a premium of eighteen dollars a share, or about fifty per cent above the market price.

Despite these figures, Yemenidjian again strenuously denied that the settlement was greenmail. "Somebody better look at the definition of greenmail," he said angrily. "Greenmail is when you threaten to do something damaging to the company unless it buys you out at a higher price. That didn't happen here. In this case, Fay Vincent made the offer, not the other way around."

Vincent views the matter differently. Asked if the Kerkorian payment could be described as greenmail, he replied, "I think it was. I think he clearly caused trouble. He sued us. He did everything possible to be disruptive. He threatened. He was very destabilizing, and we had to get rid of him. We paid him a huge premium, and he went away."

Kerkorian emerged from his encounter with Columbia with a profit of about $70 million. Ironically, he might have made even more money without antagonizing anybody. A year after he was bought out, Columbia was sold to Coca-Cola in a stock deal worth seventy-two dollars a share, and since then Coca-Cola's stock has appreciated by twenty-seven hundred per cent. If Kerkorian had kept his Columbia stake, converted it into Coca-Cola shares, and held on to it, his investment would now be worth billions. "By accepting a greenmail buyout, he made good money, but he lost about $4.5 billion that he would have made by sticking with Columbia," Allen said.

IN 1986, Kerkorian sold MGM/UA to Ted Turner for $1.5 billion, but a few months later he bought back United Artists and the MGM name and logo for $780 million. At the end of 1988, he decided it was time to cash out of the company a second time, and hired three investment bankers from Merrill Lynch—Jeffrey Barbakow, Kevin Spivak, and Trevor Fetter—to run the studio and prepare it for sale. Over the next year, two possible sales collapsed at the last minute. The first was to Rupert Murdoch, the owner of Twentieth Century Fox; the second was to Christopher Skase, an Australian businessman who turned out to have more bluster than money.

By the start of 1990, the situation at MGM/UA was dire. The company had lost $125 million in two years, and its film-production well had almost dried up. Hollywood's top agents and stars were shunning the studio. Spivak recalls that "the uncertainty surrounding MGM/UA made it very difficult to attract creative talent to work with us." When Giancarlo Parretti suddenly arrived on the scene, in January of 1990, he represented Kerkorian's last hope for a buyer.

Parretti dreamed of creating a transatlantic studio giant, but he was an unlikely Hollywood mogul. A fifty-four-year-old former hotel manager from Orvieto, he had six misdemeanor convictions for bouncing checks. He first appeared on the international film scene in 1987, when he bought into the Cannon Group, Inc., a troubled independent film company, for more than $200 million, giving him an American base. Two years later, he bought Pathé, France's oldest film company, for $200 million—money he had borrowed from Crédit Lyonnais. Pathé lost $32 million in 1989 and couldn't hope to finance a purchase of MGM/UA by itself. Parretti, though, had an idea. In return for a long-term film-distribution deal, he persuaded Steve Ross, then the chairman of Time Warner, to lend him roughly $650 million for the proposed MGM/UA takeover. With backing from Ross and Crédit Lyonnais, Parretti approached Kerkorian, and by March of 1990 a provisional deal had been agreed upon.

Unfortunately, within a month an Italian judge sentenced Parretti to almost four years in jail for fraudulent bankruptcy. Unfazed, Parretti appealed the sentence and contin-

*"Have you been a moral child?"*

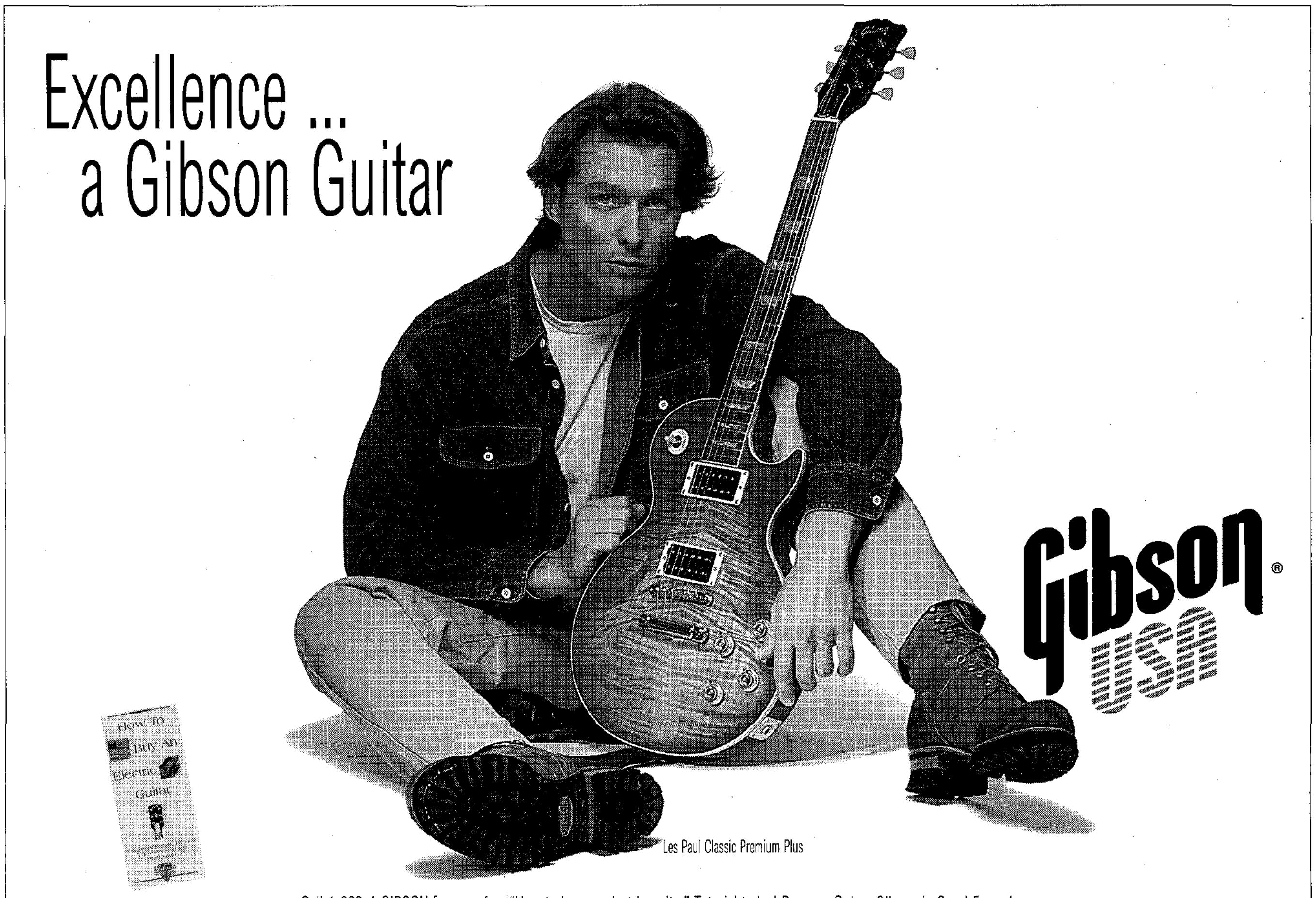
ued his negotiations with MGM/UA; Time Warner, though, backed out of the deal in June, leaving him $650 million short of the purchase price.

With no other buyer in sight, Kerkorian had a choice to make: he could forget about Parretti and concentrate on improving the studio to attract a reputable buyer or he could try to rescue the Pathé deal. He chose the second option, and devised with Parretti an ingenious two-part scheme that would use MGM/UA's own money as part of the financing. First, MGM/UA would sell off distribution rights to what was left of its film archive, which included James Bond and Rocky movies, to help raise $625 million in cash. With that money, MGM/UA would buy Pathé's two biggest operating divisions, Pathé Entertainment, Inc., and Cannon Entertainment, Inc. Then, in a separate transaction, Parretti would use the $625 million he received from MGM/UA, and $675 million he had raised elsewhere, to buy the whole of MGM/UA, including the assets it had just bought from him, for $1.3 billion.

Even by Hollywood standards, this was an unusual arrangement. Effectively, MGM/UA was mortgaging its most valuable assets to help Parretti buy out Kerkorian. Film libraries play a crucial role in the economics of a major studio, because they provide a regular stream of revenues to finance new films and carry the operation between box-office hits. To say the least, MGM/UA was taking a big risk in selling off the distribution rights to its library. Kerkorian's critics put it far more strongly. According to Crédit Lyonnais's lawsuits, the Pathé deal wasn't just a poor business decision: it was a fraud, because Kerkorian knew that the Pathé assets were worth far less than $625 million, and he also knew that without its film-library revenues MGM-Pathé would be heading for the rocks.

"They were trading away a known asset with a proven cash stream for a pie in the sky. The assets they were buying, Pathé Entertainment and Cannon Entertainment, weren't worth a pig in a poke," said Rick Holwell, the head of litigation at White & Case, who led Crédit Lyonnais's legal assault. Holwell would not comment on the terms of the legal settlement, because of the confidentiality agreement, but he agreed to talk about the case itself, which he had spent three years working on. According to him, Kerkorian knew the deals with Parretti were not in MGM/UA's best interest, but he made them anyway because he was interested only in cashing out at a high price. "Kerkorian and his colleagues had to know that this company"—the newly merged MGM-Pathé—"was going to be belly up at the time of purchase," Holwell said. "The optimistic projections that were given to their own directors and to the bank were phony, and they had to know that. In the fall of 1990, MGM/UA's internal management took Pathé's film-revenue projections, evaluated them, and came up with its own projections, which were about a third of Pathé's. These projections were never given to the MGM/UA board of directors, and they were never given to any of the lenders or creditors. They were kept in the drawer."

Spivak, who, as the second in command at MGM/UA, was in charge of its



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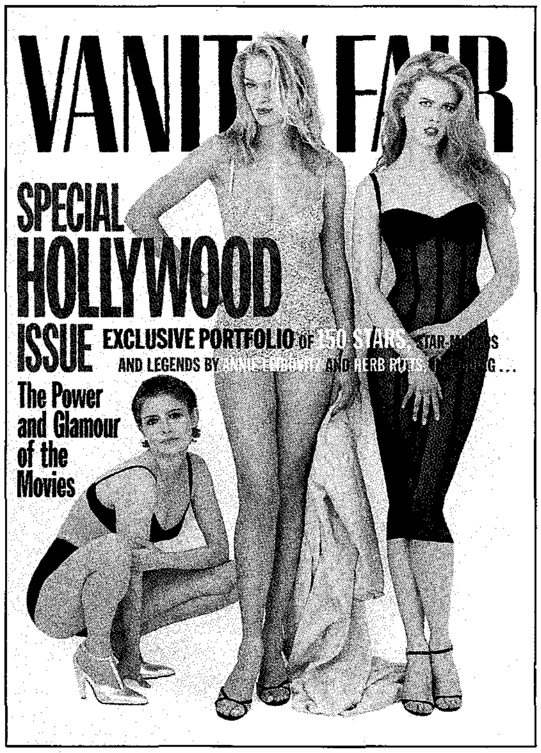

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financial department at the time, denies that projections were hidden or altered, as Holwell claims. "We provided complete access to the books and records of MGM/UA to Pathé," he said. He conceded that Pathé's revenue projections were higher than MGM/UA's but said that it was not MGM/UA's responsibility to audit Pathé's figures; that should have been done by Parretti's creditor, Crédit Lyonnais, which itself advised Parretti on the deal. Spivak also notes that MGM/UA had required Pathé to obtain independent appraisals of the revenue projections and of the deal. The independent appraisals, which were submitted to the board, concluded that the merged company would be solvent.

Yemenidjian says that none of the lawsuits should be taken seriously. "Crédit Lyonnais lent a lot of money to Giancarlo Parretti which they never should have lent. Then, when things went wrong, they looked around for somebody to blame. The bank approved all those deals. They knew exactly what was happening, so how could they say that the deal left the company without cash?"

Kerkorian's aides also point out that Crédit Lyonnais was not having much success with its legal action against him. In the California state courts, two civil cases were dismissed before trial. In the federal case, three of the four counts in the original complaint were struck down, including a claim that MGM/UA did not receive "reasonably equivalent value" in exchange for the transfers agreed to by Parretti and Kerkorian.

Nevertheless, Holwell points out that the remaining charge of intent to defraud was the most serious one, and that the dismissed state cases were still under appeal when Kerkorian elected to settle. "You can't strip the assets from a company and leave the creditors holding the bag," he said. "That is what this case is all about."

The two-part merger was approved by MGM/UA's directors on October 24, 1990. On November 1st, MGM/UA bought Pathé Entertainment and Cannon Entertainment for $625 million; a nanosecond later, Pathé bought MGM/UA for $1.3 billion. Kerkorian, who by then owned about eighty per cent of the shares, pocketed approximately a billion dollars. Parretti stepped into the shoes of Louis B. Mayer.

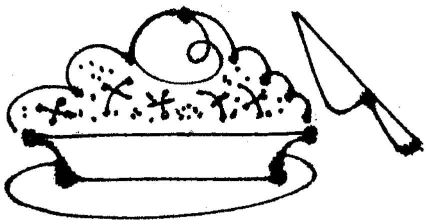
He didn't wear them long. Without the revenue from the film library, and with the heavily indebted Parretti in charge, MGM-Pathé was soon in trouble. "MGM-Pathé did not have on-hand cash necessary to pay in excess of $20 million of checks that previously had been drawn, let alone bills due and owing and bills being received in the normal course of business," Crédit Lyonnais recounted in a subsequent court filing.

Stories echoed around Hollywood about MGM/UA checks bouncing. Dustin Hoffman was only one of many victims. Few were surprised when, in March of 1991, a group of creditors filed to place the studio in bankruptcy. That ignominy was avoided only by an agreement on the part of Crédit Lyonnais to pour in more money and oust Parretti—a process that was completed in December of 1991.

WITHOUT access to the evidence, most of which is under court seal, it is impossible to resolve all the details of the MGM-Pathé debacle. Kerkorian's aides place the blame on Crédit Lyonnais and Parretti, who has just got out of jail in Los Angeles, where he is fighting extradition to France on fraud charges. "I'll tell you what left the company without cash," Yemenidjian said. "Giancarlo Parretti misappropriated $86 million."

Parretti strenuously denies any wrongdoing. Even if it turns out that he did mishandle $86 million of MGM-Pathé's funds, that can't fully account for the firm's disastrous experience after the merger. The studio was so short of cash that Crédit Lyonnais had to pump in not just $86 million but hundreds of millions of dollars to rescue it from bankruptcy court. It took an infusion of another billion dollars to restore it to full health. MGM/UA currently has two box-office hits, "Get Shorty" and "GoldenEye." Yet the bad feelings surrounding the 1990 sale persist.

With all the lawsuits settled, the question of whether Kerkorian did anything more than pull off a great deal for himself will never be resolved, but two indisputable facts remain: he walked away from MGM/UA with a billion dollars, leaving behind a heavily indebted studio with little cash flow which almost went bust five months later; and he chose to settle the lawsuits, thereby precluding a public airing of the disputes surrounding the 1990 sale.



If the federal case had gone to trial—as it was scheduled to do soon—he would have had to answer tough questions. One would have dealt with an attempt by his representatives to obtain fraudulent-conveyance insurance at the time of the sale. Court papers confirm that Kerkorian's men tried in vain to buy commercial insurance against exactly the type of fraudulent-conveyance lawsuits that were subsequently brought by Crédit Lyonnais. (Pathé had already indemnified them against future lawsuits, but that guarantee would be worthless if MGM-Pathé went bankrupt.) According to Holwell, Kerkorian's men approached Lloyd's of London, whose syndicates specialize in carrying unusual risks. "Why didn't they"—Kerkorian and his aides—"tell the board they were trying to get fraudulent-conveyance insurance?" Holwell asked. Having spent three days taking Kerkorian's deposition in Las Vegas, he was disappointed at not getting a chance to grill him on the witness stand. "We showed portions of his deposition to our mock jurors, and he got the lowest credibility rating that had ever been seen by our jury consultant," Holwell said.

Despite the controversies in Kerkorian's past, Chrysler's top managers have proved reluctant to speak out about his record—a fact that puzzles many people on Wall Street. "These guys are asleep at the wheel," said one senior banker, who asked not to be identified. "To allow him to take over a great American car company would be lunacy."

Kerkorian's representatives claim that he doesn't want day-to-day control of the carmaker, but many observers believe that his ultimate goal is to replace Chrysler's chairman, Robert Eaton, with his own man, Jerome York. With Chrysler seemingly stuck on the defensive, the initiative remains with Kerkorian, the great practitioner of casino economics. "There are certain issues that he believes will further enhance shareholder value which Chrysler has not addressed," Yemenidjian said. "There are very few people in this country who understand value the way Kirk Kerkorian does." ♦

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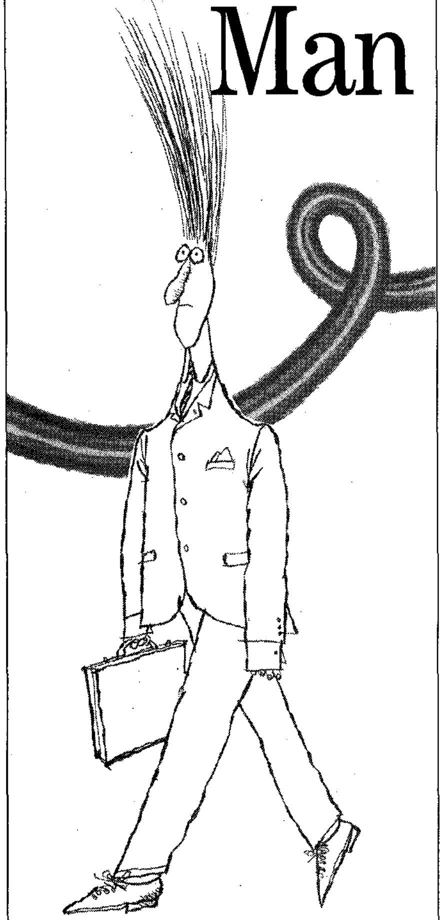

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PROFILE

# URBAN BLIGHT

*What's most galling about Jerzy Urban: his shilling for dictators, his exploitative journalism, or the fact that Poland so often proves him right?*

BY LAWRENCE WESCHLER

THE repudiation of the Solidarity stalwart Lech Walesa by an ex-Communist named Aleksander Kwasniewski in last month's Presidential elections in Poland set me to recalling the bleakest days of Polish martial law, during the early and middle eighties. Among the most peculiar spectacles that greeted the occasional visitor to Warsaw in those days were the weekly news conferences conducted by the regime's press spokesman, the former journalist Jerzy Urban, on Tuesday mornings—or, rather, the broadcast, every Tuesday evening over Polish state television, of largely uncut footage of that morning's news conference. The press conferences themselves were bizarre, for Urban, short and porcine, with ludicrously oversized, radar-dish ears, was at the same time unfailingly dapper and punctilious, usually quite witty, and almost always disarmingly candid. The evening broadcasts, however, were even more bizarre, as all across the country families and friends, in record numbers, having gathered by the light of their television sets, would be pullulating with rage at the imperiously smug face that the regime saw fit to parade before them—or, as many surmised, to hide behind. Indeed, the contempt flowing in both directions—Urban's for his fellow-countrymen and theirs for him—sometimes seemed to take on an almost erotic dimension, as caricatures and figurines of the press spokesman sprouted up around the country, many of them of a prurient cast but none too disgusting to be excluded from a collection that Urban himself was known to be happily amassing.

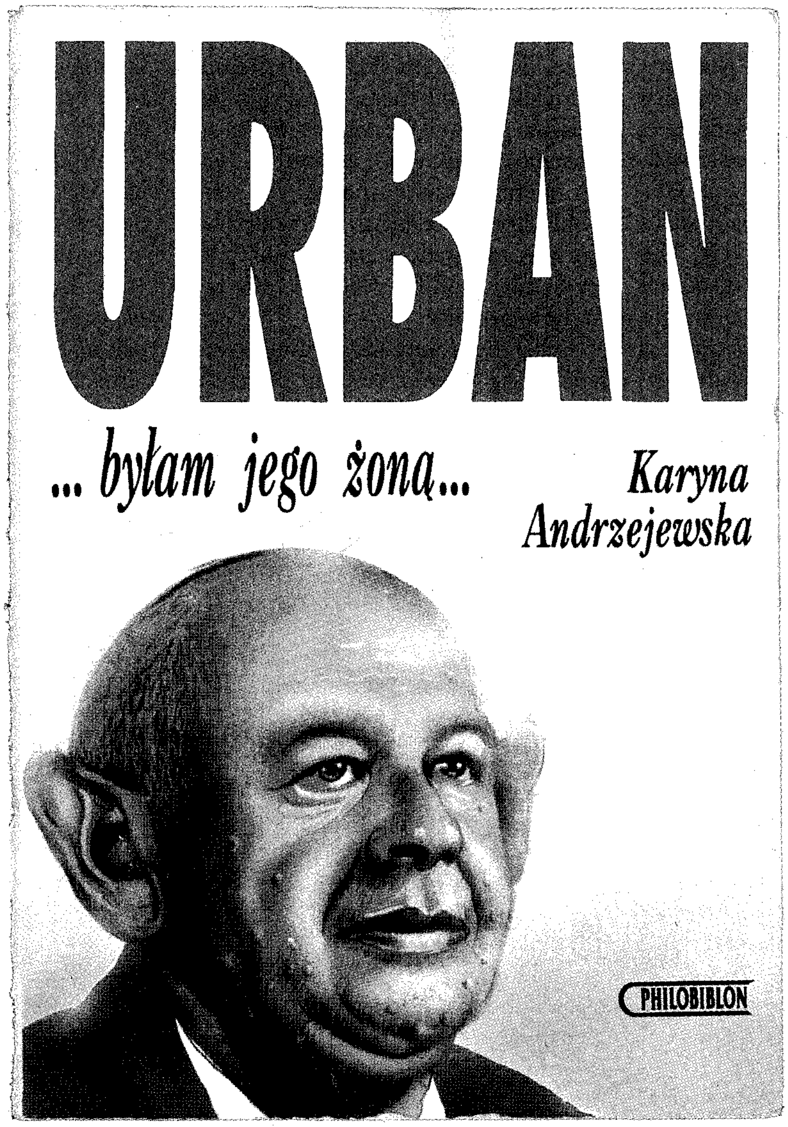
A parlor game at that time consisted of a furtive enumeration of the regime's leaders who might expect to find themselves dangling by their necks from the lampposts along Nowy Swiat, Warsaw's main drag, come the inevitable revolution—and Urban's name headed every list. When the changeover finally did come, the repudiation of Urban proved less violent, though no less seemingly final. Like everyone else in the regime for which he had fronted, he was trounced at the polls the moment his countrymen got a chance to cast any sort of free ballot, in June of 1989, and he quickly found himself out of a job. But, scrambling gamely, he almost immediately launched a tabloid journal, characteristically entitled *Nie*, or *No:* this at a moment, as many noted, when everybody else in Poland—in all of Eastern Europe—seemed to be straining to shout "Yes! Yes! Yes!"

Visiting Poland over the years, I regularly checked in with Urban (he was always good for a laugh, and sometimes for a good deal more), and I did so again around the time he was starting up *Nie*. His quarters, on the third story of a tenement building, were considerably shabbier than his customary digs, but Urban was his usual genial self. I began by asking him about his recent electoral defeat. "Ach," he said, with a shrug. "You know how it can be with girls who spend year after year cooped up with the nuns—inevitably, they end up making the easiest lays." It was an *echt*-Urban remark: concise, coarse, sacrilegious, virulently anti-Catholic—and disconcertingly apt. He predicted that after the first whiff of permissive liberty things would stabilize and the electorate would come to reflect a more normal, widely scattered array of interests and ideologies. That prediction has largely been borne out, never more so than in the recent elections.

But back then Urban, typically, made no attempt to gloss over the extent of the debacle. "My own Warsaw-Central district happened to provide a catchment for all the ballots of our diplomats abroad, and—I saw the figures—I couldn't even squeeze out a majority from among our regime's own envoys in Pyongyang and Ulan Bator and Tirana.” He seemed more bemused than abashed. Our conversation turned to matters of the previous decade, and, in particular, to the complexity of one of its principal figures, Urban’s former boss, General Wojciech Jaruzelski. The general’s character and role, I commented, had been so multilayered and ambiguous as to seem almost Shakespearean: Had he been the country’s gauleiter or its savior? As the child of parents from the landed gentry who had been brutally victimized by Stalinism, what had been his motivations?

Urban nodded wary assent to my characterization. Emboldened, I pressed on: “For that matter, Mr. Urban, I’ve often thought of *you* as a Shakespearean character—I don’t know, something of a cross between Richard III and King Lear’s Fool.”

“Ach, nonsense,” Urban responded. “And, anyway, what’s all this you’ve got with Shakespeare? I’ve always thought it would be Harold Pinter who would tell my story.”



*“Urban . . . I Was His Wife!” reads the title of one exposé. Its image of Urban is mild compared with those he projects of himself.*

JAROSLAW KOSIOREK/PHILOBIBLON

URBAN’S comment has repeatedly come to mind as, in the five years since, I’ve pondered his ability not only to survive but to triumph. (With the phenomenal success of his sulfurous rag, Urban has in the meantime vaulted into the ranks of the country’s wealthiest entrepreneurs.) The remark showed a veritable rapture of self-knowledge—for who but a Pinter could do justice to such a prickly and ominously disquieting personality? Then again, who but Urban would ever have hankered to have his portrait painted by Pinter?

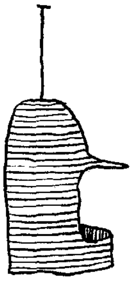
Most conversations seeking to probe the essence of the Urban phenomenon—and in Poland one finds oneself drifting into such conversations all the time—eventually turn on his being Jewish, or, more precisely, on his being a Jew among Poles. A lot of people are convinced that this fact constitutes the very center of his being, but interpretations vary from one conversation to the next. For example, during martial law many people surmised that Urban’s evident contempt for the Polish masses, and in particular for the way they had suddenly taken to preening themselves as history’s noblest, most selfless agents, had its basis in a deeply ingrained awareness of their obverse potential. As a child living through the Holocaust in Poland, he had no doubt witnessed a lot of behavior that was less than saintly. He knew what the church-besotted Poles were capable of, and he was not above reminding them.

Not that Poland’s martial-law rulers seemed especially bothered by Urban’s blunt provocations. Indeed, they seemed to have reverted to historic Middle European form, promoting a Jew to a high level of visibility precisely as a means of diverting attention and anger away from themselves. Urban can be unnervingly crude on the subject of his own Judaism—“Why should I give a damn what’s dangling down there between my legs?”—while at the same time relishing the exposure, in strangely oblique asides, of the putatively secret Jewishness of others.

These intertwined themes—Urban’s disdain for both Polish and Jewish exceptionalism—could be seen in one of his most brilliant tactical feints during martial law: his success in getting the otherwise wary Polish authorities to broadcast extended excerpts from Claude Lanzmann’s epic Holocaust documentary “Shoah” over Polish state television. On the one hand, the documentary, which sometimes seemed to focus almost as relentlessly on Polish malevolence during the Holocaust as on German malfeasance, was custom-designed to puncture any Polish pretensions toward national beneficence. On the other hand, in many of these scenes Lanzmann tended to go overboard in making his case, notably in sequences in which he allowed extremely cloddish and backward peasants and villagers to stand for the entire Polish nation—and Urban was thereby able to let the mortified Poles know exactly what the Europeans, whose approval they always seemed to be currying so desperately, *really* thought of them. It was a deliciously cynical and profoundly dispiriting double whammy—precisely what the propaganda doctor ordered. As for his own feelings about Lanzmann’s documentary, Urban said to me some years later, “Sure, some

Poles did some terrible things during the war, but—what?—we're supposed to take lessons in the proper treatment of a nation's Jews from the *French*?"

THE cosmopolitan family into which Jerzy Urban was born, in the summer of 1933, the year of Hitler's ascension to power in Germany, had been assimilated for several generations—so thoroughly that Jerzy didn't learn that he was Jewish until the middle of the war. His mother was from a Russian-Jewish family of considerable wealth and—not untypical of such families—considerable revolutionary fervor as well. Jerzy's father was a co-owner and editor of the second-largest newspaper in Poland's second-largest city, Lodz. The newspaper was socialist, and displayed few of the anti-Soviet phobias rampant among most of the other Polish papers of the time. In fact, at one point Urban's father found it necessary to file a libel suit against the head of a Poznan nationalist Catholic daily for calling him a Russian agent. When Jerzy was informed of his Jewishness by his parents—he had to be told so that he would know to keep the secret—his first reaction was to rush to a mirror and wail, "Am I then really as ugly as *them*?" (For Urban, by all accounts an unusually attractive child, the category "Jew" had until that moment connoted only the black-garbed Orthodox believers to the east.) There may be some knot of causality in that incident (Jewishness / ugliness / contrariness), but Urban had been a little contrarian well before then—or so he now likes to recall. His first impulse at the outset of the war, he boasts, was to root for the Germans.



Owing to the paper's anti-Fascist line, the name of Jerzy's father was prominently featured on a prewar list of the Nazis' principal enemies, and that forced him to consider the advisability of an early escape. The Urban family was already three days out of Lodz, racing east, when Hitler's armed forces crossed Poland's western border, on September 1, 1939. Variously scattered in the ensuing days by bombings, strafings, and the Red Army's invasion from the east, the Urbans were eventually reunited on the Soviet side, in an apartment in the Polish-Ukrainian town of Lvov. Thanks in part to Jerzy's courtyard bragging about the family's former wealth and station, his father was arrested by the Soviet secret police on the ground of having bourgeois tendencies. He was released only when he produced news accounts detailing the Poznan editor's libels against him. After that, the family was for the most part left alone until the Nazi-Soviet pact broke down and Hitler's armies came storming eastward once again. The Urbans fled to the remote countryside, and there, amid primitive peasants and a welter of occupying and resistance forces, they managed to tough out the remainder of the war. To solidify his Aryan credentials, the young Urban was required to attend church every Sunday, and he clearly did not take to the experience.

Urban must have lived through some harrowing events (at one point, he found himself part of a group subjected to a mock execution), but nowadays he tends to downplay such experiences, preferring to highlight his outrageously inappropriate antics. For example, he recalls being so derisive of the terror shown by the occupants of one basement bomb shelter that they kicked him out permanently. He loves telling such stories. (Perhaps he's not even making them up.) One thing is clear: he cannot abide either playing the role of passive victim or being cast in it.

After the war, the family returned to Lodz. Urban joined the Communist Polish Youth League there and enjoyed a passionate, if brief, romance with Marxism. Of his schooling he now brags, "I was a complete failure. I beat the Polish record in bad marks. I ended up attending seventeen schools before I was finished, or, rather, they were finished with me. I kept getting thrown out." It was one scandal after another. Four times, he applied to join the Party and each time was rejected; for instance, in 1952, he says, he "got called before a student disciplinary tribunal for singing improper songs." Like what? "Oh, 'Hitlerowski'—you know, old Nazi propaganda songs."

After so many rejections, Urban gave up; thus, he was not a Party member even during the period of martial law, when he was serving as the Communist regime's chief spokesman. Indeed, from the regime's point of view his apparent independence constituted a principal element of his cachet. (Actually, Urban did make one last attempt to join the Party—in 1989, when things had collapsed completely. "Not at five minutes to midnight," his friend and fellow-journalist Daniel Passent marvels, "but at ten minutes *past* midnight." Urban was very likely the last Pole ever to apply for Party membership. The Communists could no longer even lay their hands on the requisite application forms.)

Although back in the early fifties Urban lacked the Party's imprimatur, he nevertheless drifted into journalism, where his father still had a little influence. In 1951, he joined the staff of *Nowa Wies* (*New Farmland*). One of his editors there, Irena Rybczyuska, said of Urban, "He was a handsome if shy boy who came advertised as talented, raw, and a bit naughty. But he was also funny, cheerful, exotic—something new, for he didn't seem to bear the imprint of the Holocaust at all. There were other Jews there, older, more sombre, but Jerzy was completely different. He was well liked, but he could be mean and terribly hurtful, and he simply didn't know when to stop. There's a Russian expression 'He'd kill his own father for the sake of a joke.' And that was Jerzy. In a photograph album we put together at the time, he scrawled under his own photo, 'Fuck anyone who thinks badly of me.' And that was Jerzy, too."

In a typical journalistic stunt early in his career, Urban placed an ad in a Krakow newspaper, posing as a matchmaker seeking a wife on behalf of a rich Polish émigré living in Britain. Dozens of elegant Krakow women answered the ad and proceeded to spill their most intimate histories to this supposed matchmaker, who then published a scathing account of the adventure, singling out the various candidates by name. (One of them turned out to be another journalist, on the prowl for the other side of the story—a second shameless reporter, shamelessly pretending. Urban was entranced by this woman, his equal in cynicism, and they eventually married.)

After Stalin's death, in 1953, the Soviet imperial system began to thaw, ini-

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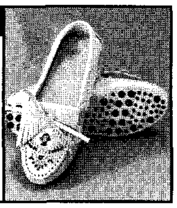

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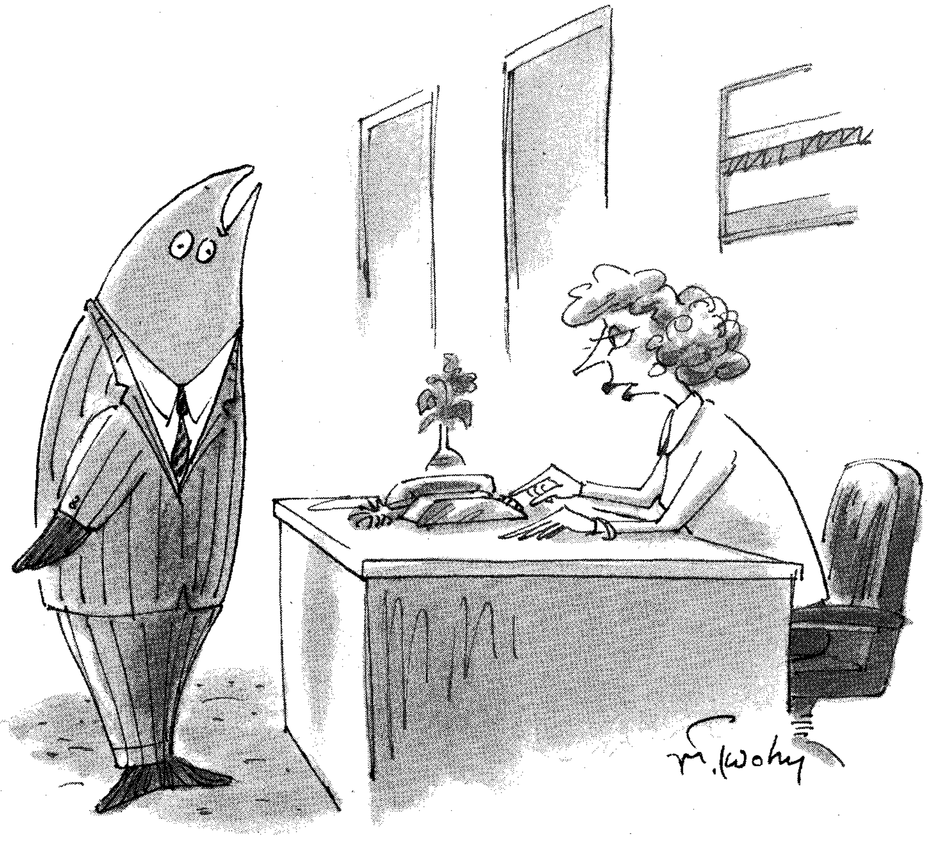
tially along its periphery and particularly among the young. By the fall of 1955, a group of iconoclasts in Poland had seized control of *Po Prostu*, a once ardently Stalinist youth weekly, converting it into the voice of a new generation of socialist reformers. In no time, Urban was heading the paper's domestic desk. The Old Guard, under Soviet pressure, tried to reassert its authority, but all through 1956 *Po Prostu* fought back tenaciously. It was at the center of the movement that culminated in Poland's celebrated Springtime in October, when Wladyslaw Gomulka, newly reinstated as Party First Secretary, successfully stared down a challenge from Khrushchev. Within a year, however, Gomulka was himself rigidifying, and one of his earliest targets was *Po Prostu*. By October of 1957, the paper had been shut down; Urban was out of a job and, not for the last time in his career, forbidden to publish under his own name.

For three lean years (years rendered all the more anxious by the birth of his only child, a daughter), Urban was forced to publish under pseudonyms or by way of sympathetic fronts. By the early sixties, he had regained a tenuous aboveground respectability, writing for *Polityka*, one of the most sophisticated journals in Eastern Europe, and then he blew it all once more, this time by publishing a savage profile of a prudish anti-alcohol crusader. (Urban, famously devoted to good drink, had been annoyed, on a trip to the crusader's home town of Krakow, at not being able to find a single watering hole open past 7 P.M., and his piece constituted an act of righteously sarcastic vengeance.) Trouble was, the anti-alcohol crusader turned out to be a good friend of the equally prudish Gomulka, who personally ordered Urban's banishment yet again. For three more years, Urban was thrown back upon the forbearance of editors occasionally willing to slip him payments in exchange for pseudonymous articles. (One of these, Dariusz Fikus, was the son of the Poznan editor who had once libelled his father.)

By the late sixties, though, Urban was once again able to publish under his own name, and his signature style was becoming increasingly prized by a widening public: funny, slashing, colloquial, sometimes unspeakably vulgar, but often irresistibly astute. In 1969, Urban rejoined *Polityka*. Its editor-in-chief,



*"One of those fish with the eyes on the same side to see you, sir."*

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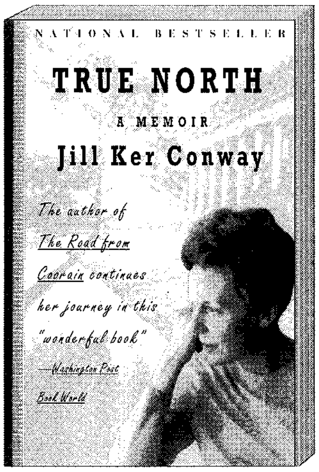
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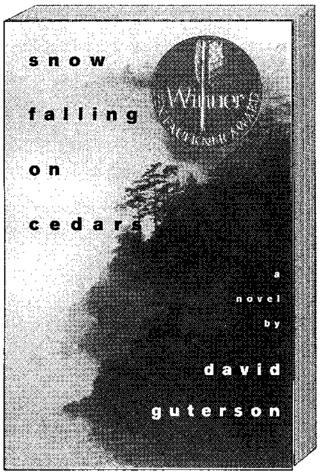
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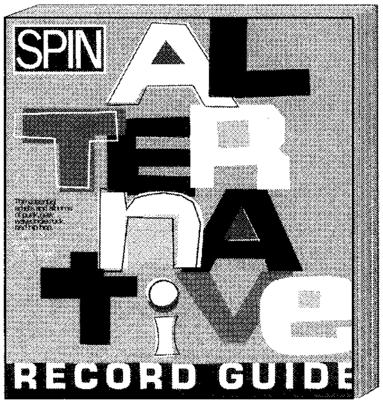
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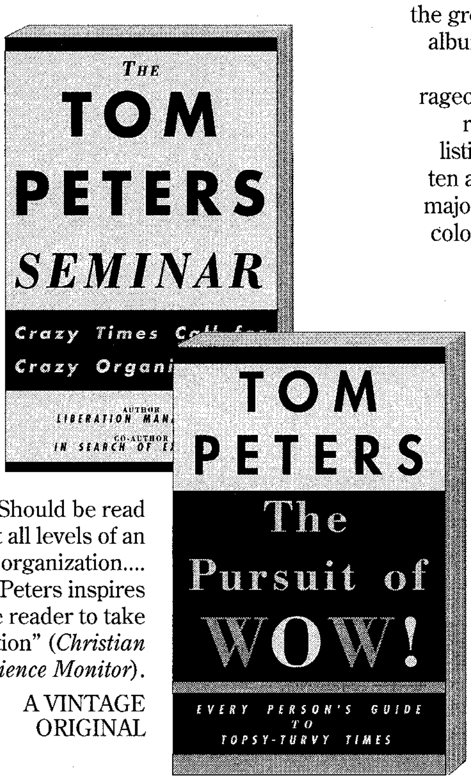
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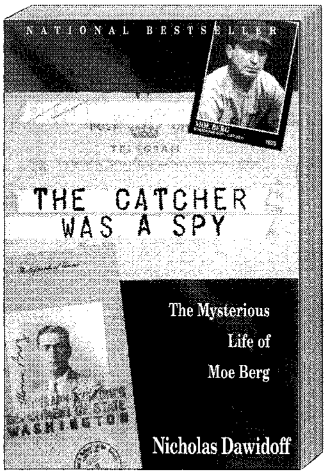
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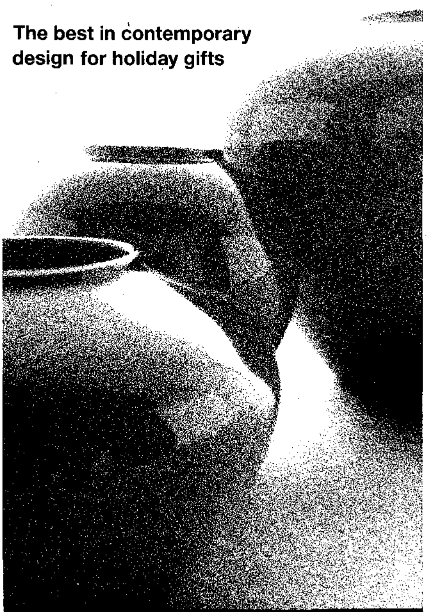

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Mieczyslaw Rakowski, had gained considerable international prestige in 1968 by resolutely shielding his staff from anti-Semitic purges sweeping much of the country during a top-level Communist Party power struggle. Still, Rakowski wasn't exactly a saint; he steered his weekly along a modestly adventuresome course (reformist, but never *too*), steadfastly supporting his patrons in the Party leadership until just before a shakeup, at which point he would stake out a "reformist" position. He neatly turned this trick in 1970, when Gomulka was sacked in favor of Edward Gierek, and again in 1980, when the extravagantly corrupt Gierek fell before the Solidarity onslaught. Urban, in turn, became one of Rakowski's key aides, serving as national editor of *Polityka* during some of its most influential years, in the mid-seventies.

A remarkable photograph survives from that era, a group portrait of the magazine's staff and friends, taken in 1978 at a gathering convened to celebrate Rakowski's twentieth anniversary as editor. In retrospect, it's an eerie image, for over the next several years Poland's journalists—and these were, without doubt, among the country's finest, including Ryszard Kapuscinski, Hanna Krall, Daniel Passent, Wieslaw Gornicki, and Dariusz Fikus—would play an inordinately important role in the country's history, some in opposition to the system (Fikus, for instance, would become head of the Solidarity-aligned Polish Journalists' Association) and others in its defense. In February of 1981, six months into the Solidarity era, the new Prime Minister, General Jaruzelski, appointed Rakowski his Deputy Prime Minister—and Rakowski, in turn, brought Urban along as government press spokesman. Ten months later, Jaruzelski and Rakowski presided over the imposition of martial law, with Urban providing color commentary and rationale. Half the people in that convivial 1978 photograph would in effect end up incarcerating the other half. And yet even today it's possible to wonder why Urban wound up on the side he did.

"Through 1976, Urban might still have fallen our way," Adam Michnik told me recently. Michnik, one of the foremost theorists of the movement that became Solidarity and one of the martial-law regime's most celebrated and longest-suffering prisoners, today heads the country's leading daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza*. "He had no love for those idiot Communists—he, of all people, could see right through them. In the end, though, I think three factors prevented it. First of all, his extreme contempt for the Church and the tropes of Polish nationalism. Second, his conviction, given geopolitical realities, as we used to call them, that serious resistance was fundamentally futile. And, third, his fear of the loss of his material comforts."

Daniel Passent, like Urban a Holocaust survivor who ended up supporting the martial-law regime, offered an account similar to Michnik's, but with a twist. "The thing you have to understand about Urban is that, like many of the rest of us, he was *defined* by his survival of the Holocaust," Passent said. "He's incredibly courageous in his writing and always has been—much more so than many of his current critics—but he is animated above all by a need for personal security. As a child, he saw the horrible weight of absolute power descending on a defenseless country, and his whole life became devoted to preventing a recurrence of that phenomenon. He—we—felt that Solidarity was taking a terrible risk of provoking just such an outcome all over again. Which is why the weaker the system became—a system whose pathetic limitations he understood as well as, if not better than, anyone else—the more vigorously he rose to its defense. This is what the Holocaust produced, what it honed—a generation of individuals who regularly attempted to lash out at the walls while at the same time holding up the ceiling."

On the other hand, many of Solidarity's strongest supporters—including, notably, Michnik—were also Jews. (Perhaps significantly, they were of a younger generation—the *children* of returning Holocaust survivors.) "For many of us, in the end it was, as our great poet Zbigniew Herbert puts it, just a matter of *taste*," Michnik suggests. "Urban had an iron gut and could stomach all that crap. Others of us simply couldn't."

MANY years after the fact, I asked Jerzy Urban how he had felt on December 13, 1981, as martial law was declared. "I felt *wonderful*," he replied,

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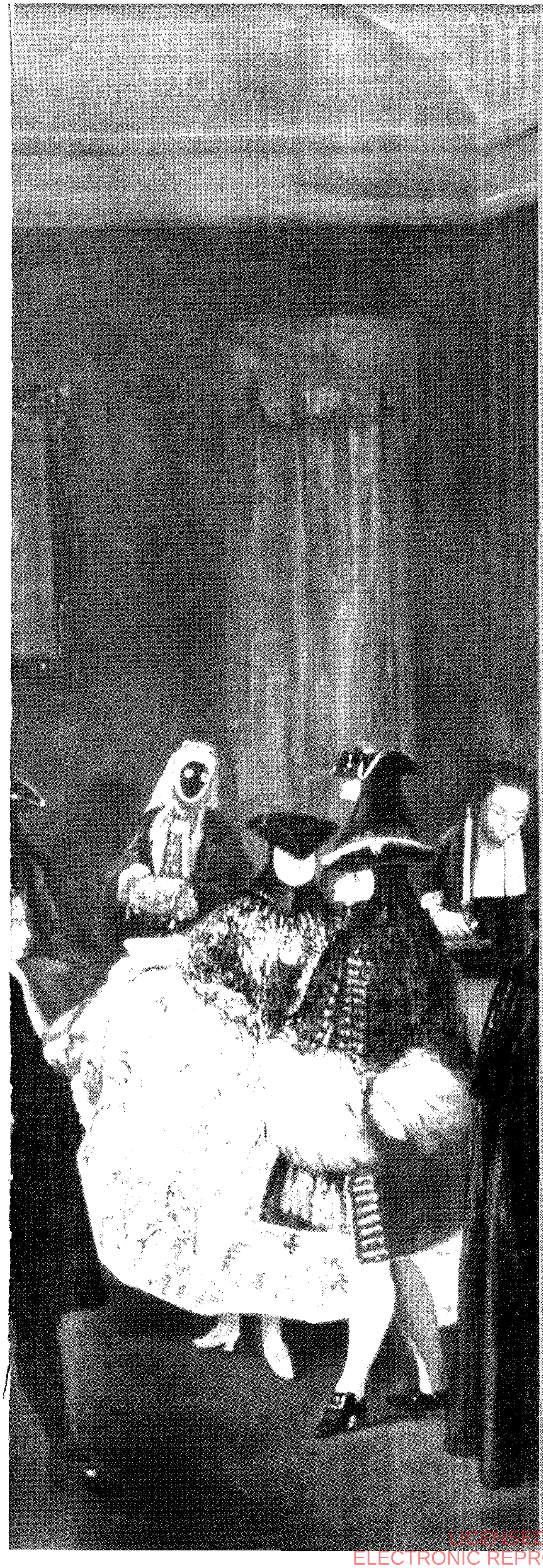


# See what Italian fashion was like 700 years before supermodels and runway shows.

## "Serenissima: The Arts Of Fashion In Venice"

**November 29, 1995 - January 20, 1996**

Long before the current crop of designers emerged from Milan, Venice was a fashion capital and home to thriving guilds of tailors, weavers and other artisans. A new exhibition at New York City's The Equitable Gallery will focus on these craftsmen and the extraordinary apparel they created. The show spans the 13th through the 18th centuries and includes rare Venetian costumes, textiles and accessories along with related paintings, drawings and prints.

The Equitable Gallery is located at 787 Seventh Avenue at 51st Street in the atrium of the Equitable Tower. Admission is free and the Gallery is open from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. weekdays and on Saturdays from noon to 5:00 p.m.

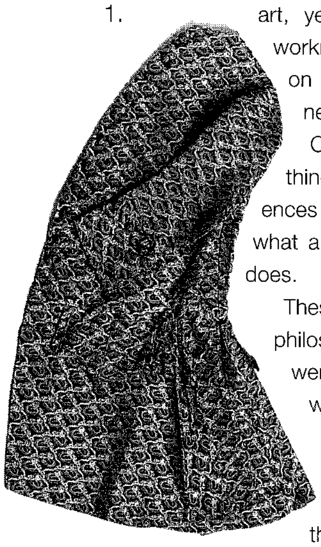
"Serenissima: The Arts of Fashion in Venice" is organized and sponsored by The Italian Trade Commission within the program "Moda Made in Italy," and The Consorzio Maestri Calzaturieri del Brenta. The Equitable Gallery is sponsored by The Equitable Life Assurance Society of the U.S. For further information, please call 212-554-4818.

# The Essence Of Italian Fashion

As befits the birthplace of the Renaissance, Italy holds in the highest esteem all things beautiful. It is little wonder that in such a heady atmosphere fashion is more than a simple vocation, it is instead a craft handed down from generation to generation. A birthright. A passion. From the humble tailor to the internationally-celebrated designer, Italians invest themselves in the art of fashion with meticulous pride born of a legacy of excellence.

There are no ungrounded flights of fancy in the fashions of Italy, no mere confections whipped up simply to startle. Italian fashion is art, yet infinitely wearable, subtly sophisticated. The workmanship is unparalleled and attention is lavished on everything from the weave of a fabric to the richness of a print. Quality is as revered as creativity. Often described as "refined," Italian fashion is anything but dry. Humor is abundant, residing in sly references to a vast design vocabulary. Restraint is vital, and what a garment doesn't say is as important as what it does.

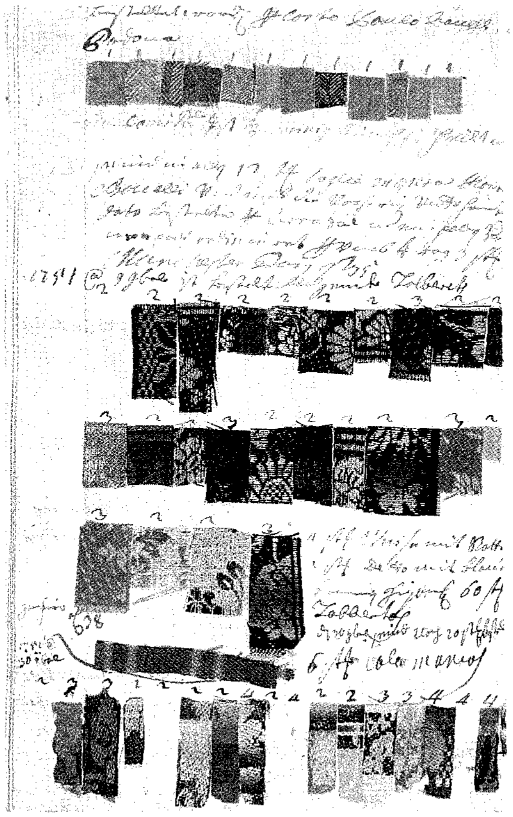
1.



These tenets of Italian fashion philosophy are not new. They were born some 700 years ago when fashion reached its apogee in Venice and the canal-laced city was one of the fashion capitals of the West. A chronicle of this extraordinary period in Venice's history, "Serenissima: The Arts of Fashion in Venice," showcases singular examples of men's and women's finery including exquisite lace, sumptuous velvets and silks, and intricate embroideries. Related paintings, sketches and tools of the trade are also featured.

Placing special emphasis on the craftsmanship for which Italian fashion remains renowned, the exhibition delves into hallmarks of the period including the Venetian romance with the masquerade, the city-wide fascination with black and scarlet, and the influence of the Orient. It also traces the development of the business of fashion, examining the formation, during the Republic, of the various fashion guilds. These guilds form the earliest models for the highly organized, efficient and technologically sophisticated industrial system that characterizes the fashion industry of Italy today.

Of course the exhibit is more than a window into the past, it also offers an uncanny glimpse of the future. In "Serenissima: The Arts of Fashion in Venice," it is easy to trace the lineage of numerous styles that modern Italian designers will showcase in their upcoming spring collections.



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> "Italian fashion is art, yet infinitely wearable, subtly sophisticated."

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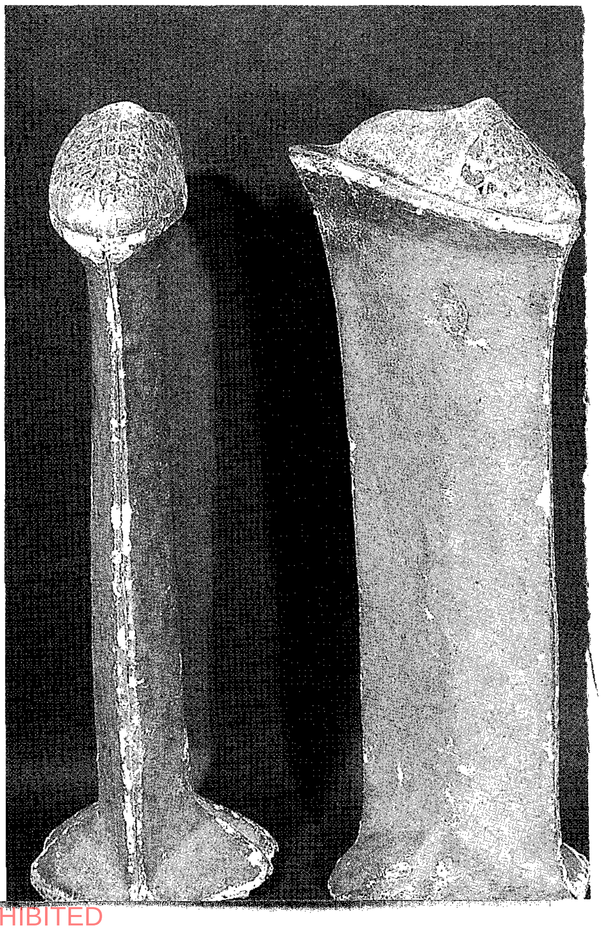

2.

**Cover:** Detail from *The Parlor*, 1725-1750, Master of the Ridotto. Pietro Scarpa.

**1.** Frock-coat from the late 18th century. From the collection of Alberto Tagliabue.

**2.** Woman's shoe and overshoe from the late 18th century. Rossimoda.

**3.** Order book, 1749-1761. Bolzano, Camera di Commercio.

**4.** Platform shoes from the late 1400s. Venice, Musei Civici.

without a moment's hesitation, a mischievous grin spreading across his face. He took a drag on one of the Gitanes *filtres* he likes to smoke, and continued, "Of course I felt wonderful. At last, the battle was engaged. The previous situation had been unbearable, to be continuously under attack like that, just taking it always, just defending and defending. I'd been dreaming night and day of being able to shift to the attack."

During the sixteen months leading up to martial law, Urban's disgust with the euphoric course of the country's supposed national renewal became increasingly pronounced. For the first time in his career, he became an overtly political polemicist, though in his own distinctive way. One day, he wrote that his second wife (he had divorced his first wife around the time of Gomulka's fall and in 1972 married a woman named Karyna Andrzejewska) had come home ostentatiously sporting a Solidarity button, and naturally—or so he crowed—he had slapped her. When his daughter similarly began championing a Solidarity line, he took to deriding her in his column as "the unaborted." Meanwhile, in addition to his role as government spokesman he began playing a substantial part in state policymaking, especially with regard to the delicate negotiations concerning Solidarity's proposed anti-censorship initiative. Much to the surprise of many of his former journalistic colleagues, now ranged across the table from him, Urban, who earlier in his career had often suffered under censorship regulations, now was insisting upon their supposed necessity.

Dariusz Fikus, Urban's colleague at *Polityka*, told me, "Urban was one of those who really *hated* Solidarity from the very start. For one thing, it ruined his life style—this whole game where he could live in comfort while at the same time appearing to be unconventional and somehow vaguely in opposition. These people were *seriously* in opposition. But, beyond that, Solidarity represented everything he hated with his whole heart—all the superficial trappings of religiosity, the open-air Masses, and the whole Church-and-nation business, which awoke deep feelings of revulsion in him."

Urban was not directly involved in planning the imposition of martial law, but he was close to those who were (especially Rakowski), so that he knew enough to wander over to Rakowski's command headquarters around midnight as troops fanned out across the country, eventually making thousands of arrests (including many from among the pair's former colleagues). Families fractured under the strain of martial law; Rakowski's son defected, and his wife left him. General Jaruzelski's daughter, in her last year of high school, went to live with her boyfriend, a leader of the student Solidarity group. Urban's daughter, for her part, gave her apartment over to the underground, which is how it came to pass that the first few issues of *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, the weekly newsletter that would become the clandestine opposition's principal public organ, were edited practically under the government press spokesman's nose.

Of such diversions, though, Urban was largely oblivious. He was keeping his eye on the main game, which consisted of a tremendously sophisticated attempt to manage the country's mood. At the outset, that mood seemed implacably hostile, and the best the regime might hope for, it seemed, was society's acquiescence as the futility of further resistance became clear. Over time, even if the regime could never inspire enthusiasm on behalf of its own programs, it might succeed in sowing significant misgivings about the opposition's competence or effectiveness, or even, finally, relevance. That, anyway, was the hope, the plan. As Michael Kaufman, the *Times* correspondent on the scene during the mid-eighties, has pointed out, Urban recognized that for such a strategy to have any chance of succeeding the regime at least had to become an active player in the battle for people's minds, "by creating a spectacle so compelling that people simply wouldn't be able to stay away or keep themselves from watching." Kaufman adds, "That was the rationale behind those weekly press conferences."

Christopher Bobinski, the *Financial Times*' veteran Warsaw correspondent, recently told me, "Up until Urban's tenure, the government would never re-

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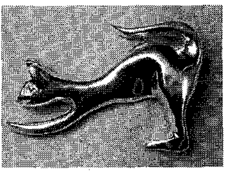

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spond at all, to anything, period—never felt it had to. But for a brief period there Urban was really doing something truly astounding. He had created a forum where you could ask a question and he would feel a responsibility to reply." From the start, Urban set ground rules for the weekly sessions: large sections of the session would be broadcast on that evening's television news, and the entire transcript of the session would be printed the next morning in the government daily; no question would be considered off limits, and the conference wouldn't be considered over until there were no remaining questions. "I mean, that was unheard of," Bobinski continued. "It was like having parliamentary question time in the middle of martial law. Urban's counterparts in East Berlin, Prague, and Moscow—they all looked on aghast, they couldn't believe it, they despised him for it. But he understood that if you just showed up and answered the questions, no matter what, you were already ahead in the propaganda war."

Not that Urban ever made any further attempts, beyond just showing up, to endear himself to the Polish masses. Early in the days of martial law, when he was asked about the probable effects of Western economic sanctions he shrugged and curtly replied, "The authorities will always eat their fill." When he was asked about the status of the interned Lech Walesa, he would often dismiss him as "the non-head of a non-union, a nonentity." Asked to respond to the occasional underground broadside, he would usually demur: "The government takes stands only on matters of public significance, and these carpings are of no significance whatever." On the other hand, whenever the underground called a strike action Urban would be there the next Tuesday, providing detailed and generally reliable figures on nationwide compliance with the strike call—figures that initially might have looked bad from the regime's point of view but began looking better and better as the years passed and Urban's strategy of demoralization took hold.

Not that his cleverness made him any friends—and not that it bothered him, either. Fikus told me, "The thing you have to understand about Urban is how deeply this business was rooted in his character. It was a pleasure for him: *he loves being hated*. Back in the old days at *Polityka*, his greatest joy invariably was reading the letters from readers attacking him, the more virulently the better."

Urban could be damnably clever, as in the Kuklinski affair, when he took a potential propaganda disaster—the revelation of how one of General Jaruzelski's most trusted aides had been an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency and had defected just a few weeks before martial law—and managed to turn it around. He did so in part by pointing out that the Reagan Administration must have had full knowledge of the timing of the upcoming declaration of martial law—and had decided not to pass the information on to Solidarity, presumably because, according to Urban, it, too, wanted the troublesome Solidarity liquidated, for all the obvious sorts of geopolitical reasons. This was a devastating argument and, typically, not one that lent itself to easy refutation.

But Urban could also be just damnably damnable, as in the prelude to the disastrous Popieluszko affair, in the fall of 1984, when, week after week, from his Tuesday podium, he fired off increasingly scurrilous denunciations aimed at an enormously charismatic opposition priest named Jerzy Popieluszko. Urban claimed that this remarkable and intensely spiritual young priest was indulging in quasi-Orwellian "orgies of hatred" at his ever more popular monthly Masses for the Homeland, "feeding negative emotions" and "heating up political feelings against our warning that such activities *cannot* be tolerated." ("Perhaps everyone in Poland has had an opportunity to convince himself that we do not toss around such phrases lightly," Urban went on ominously.) Then one morning the priest was kidnapped and bludgeoned to death by three renegade agents of the state security services.

Popieluszko's martyrdom stains Urban's reputation to this day; people who (off the record) will forgive him a good deal will not forgive him that, and, uncharacteristically, it is a subject that he himself doesn't particularly enjoy returning to, even though it has now been fairly well established that the assassination plot was in no way promulgated by the regime's leadership but was, if anything, carried out as a provocation against that leadership by some of its internal opponents, intent on polarizing and radicalizing the country's political situation. Still, Urban's inflammatory rhetoric doubtless contributed to the creation of a context within which such a provocation could have been expected to occur.

That incident brought out another salient aspect of Urban's tenure as press spokesman—one that is becoming clearer in hindsight. Not only was he facing off against the nation during many of those news conferences; he and Rakowski and Jaruzelski and their allies, attempting to be moderately reformist, were also continually having to confront dogged opposition among more deeply embedded elements in the Party and in the security services. In effect, they were being played for history's chumps: others in the regime were perfectly content to let them be the disciplinarians bringing Solidarity to heel, but those others had no intention of allowing the kind of systemic reforms that might have addressed the social and economic inadequacies that had led to Solidarity's rise in the first place. Jaruzelski and his allies' failure to implement such reforms or to right the desperately listing economy in turn set the stage for the collapse of their entire project and the resurgence of Solidarity in the elections of June, 1989.

URBAN himself managed to survive the debacle quite nicely. To begin with, he halted his own downward spiral by slapping together, in a mere four weeks, a scandalous memoir, entitled "Urban's Alphabet," in which he proceeded to skewer, in alphabetical order, virtually all the élite members of the establishment and of the opposition, either people he knew personally or people whose police files he had had frequent occasion to peruse. He focussed on the most inappropriate aspects of their careers, on marital infidelities, or on sexual peccadilloes: the entire package pickled in his own distinctive style—gutter con brio. And, as it turned out, Poles couldn't get enough of it: seven hundred and fifty thousand copies were in circulation after a month—this in a country of barely forty million people.

Urban used the proceeds to found *Nie*, his weekly color tabloid, which

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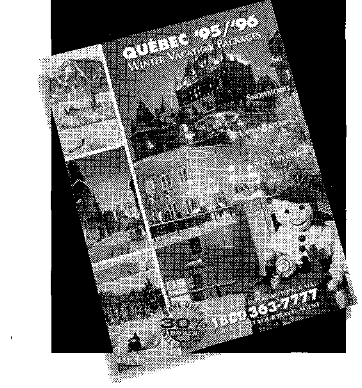

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soon became a sort of cross between the French *Canard Enchaîné* (or the British *Private Eye*) and Al Goldstein's *Screw*—scandalmongering, indecent, replete with grotesquely obscene drawings of a not even sophomoric subtlety. And once again Urban's instincts proved startlingly lucrative.

For a while, it seemed impossible to sate the Poles' appetite for the outrages of their monstrous troll. (The first book was soon followed by a second, whose title, "Jajakobyly," can be translated as "I, the Former . . ." or as "Mare's Balls"; it also became a best-seller.) Not long thereafter, Karyna Andrzejewska, who had got divorced from Urban in the mid-eighties, cashed in with her own slim volume, under the heartrending title "Urban . . . I Was His Wife!" The cover of Andrzejewska's book featured a painting of Urban's head, a greenish-pink visage covered with pustules, the ears hairy and demonically pointed. And yet when it came to slanderous imagery of Urban he himself was the master. The frontispiece of his "Alphabet" book had a photograph of the author in a ratty, open-collared workshirt, his fleshy mouth wide open as he stuffed in an obviously tasty morsel. And this was nothing compared with the caricatures and photomontages that Urban presently began running alongside his weekly column in *Nie*. If Urban's aesthetic and political style had always been "in your face," it was precisely this business of *his* face in your face that was its essence.

As for *Nie*, it could have been called *Taboo*, for from the very start Urban revelled in the new era of press freedom—an era free, that is, of the sorts of restrictions that he himself had spent the previous decade enforcing. There was, to begin with, the tabloid's emphasis on the blatantly sexual—sex for its own sake (pinups and crotch shots) but also whatever prurient details could be flushed out of any other sort of story. When President Clinton visited Warsaw during the summer of 1994 and every other Polish paper was focussing on such topics as the likelihood of America's support for the country's earliest possible entry into NATO, *Nie* led with the headline "PENIS CLINTONA," over a story based largely on expert analyses by such alleged authorities as Paula Jones and Gennifer Flowers.

Urban gloried in breaking an even more strictly observed taboo, against ridiculing the suddenly all-powerful Catholic Church. He published cartoons skewering the Polish Primate, Jozef Cardinal Glemp—perhaps the only man in Poland with ears bigger than his own. And *Nie* also specialized in exposés of priests having sex with their housekeepers, their wards, their neighbors' livestock, and, especially, one another.

Urban delighted in shattering political taboos as well. He was the first journalist, for example, to attack the country's new President, the sainted Nobel laureate Lech Walesa. He did not have that field to himself for long, but his assaults have remained among the most unsparing and, particularly in the months preceding the recent election, the most damaging. (Urban has for years displayed a personal animus toward Walesa, as if this one man contained a distillation of every oafish thing that Urban despises about the entire Polish nation.) He began running a column that consisted of nothing but verbatim transcripts of the President's often impenetrable impromptu pronouncements. He regularly featured embarrassing exposés of the shenanigans surrounding the President's family and his court. And he published a map revealing the location of Walesa's secret vacation fishing camp, complete with pointers on how to avoid police roadblocks.

It would be unfair, however, to dismiss *Nie's* coverage as merely a cavalcade of blasphemous gestures. For Urban has cobbled together an often powerfully effective presence on the new democracy's political scene. Several years ago, as Parliament was being stampeded by the Catholic Church into passing the most punitively restrictive anti-abortion law in all Europe, for example, *Nie* announced that it would offer fifty million zlotys (about four thousand dollars) to any woman willing to admit to an affair with a member of Parliament which had resulted in an abortion, preferably one paid for by him. "You should have seen the panicky, ashen faces in Parliament the next morning," a legislative staff member told me.

*Nie* broke financial scandals involving formerly oppositionist parvenus, of which there were a dismaying number.

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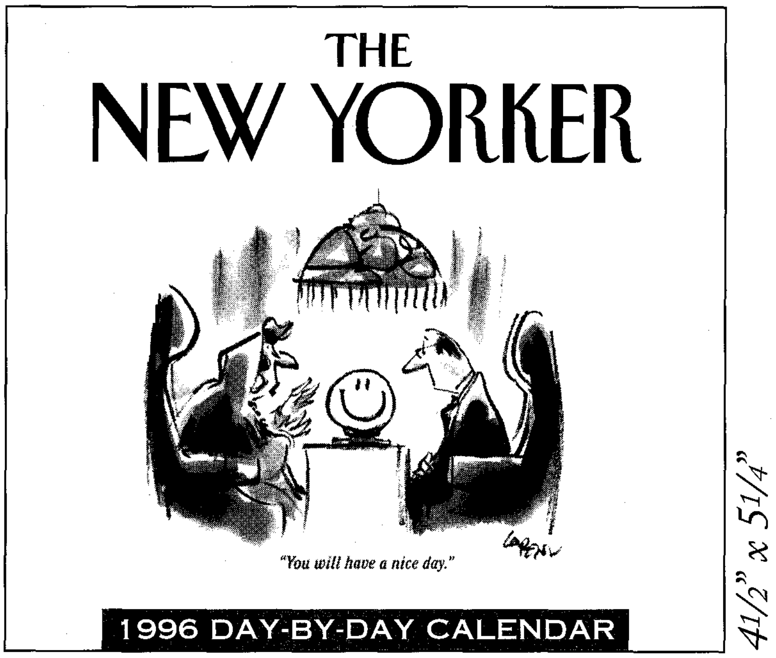
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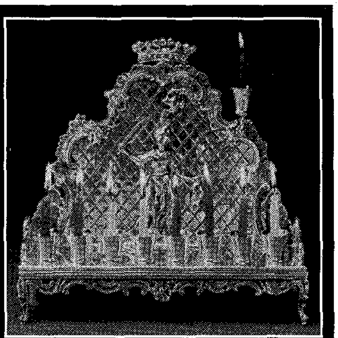

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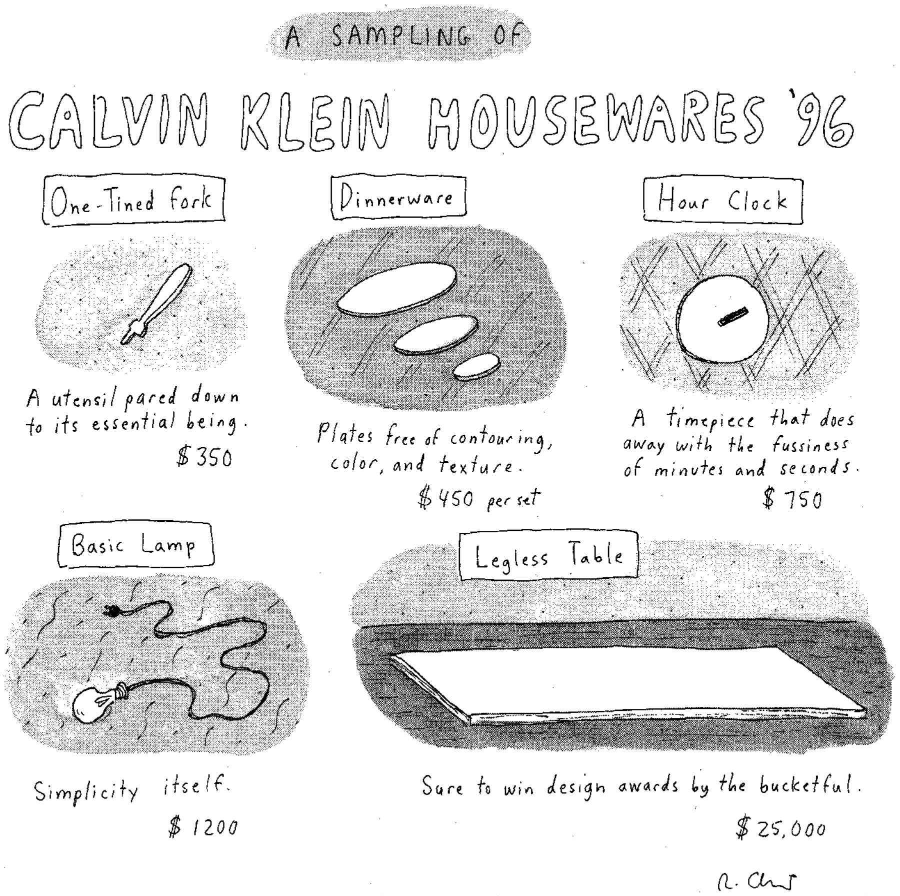
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(It seemed to be one of *Nie's* goals to insinuate, however unfairly, that not a thing had changed, and that the new politicians were every bit as corrupt as the old—a sensible rhetorical ploy, since it would have been futile to try to deny the prodigious extent of corruption in the previous regime.) *Nie* also castigated what it saw as the neoliberal excesses of the new financial planners, with their desire for a possibly overabrupt transition to capitalism. Urban insists that he generally favors the shift to an open-market system, and claims to have lobbied tirelessly for just such a change during the Jaruzelski years; he simply feels that it was being rushed by Solidarity's initial technocratic team—a theme that was echoed in Aleksander Kwazniewski's Presidential campaign. At one point, *Nie* ran a contest in which old-age pensioners were invited to send in their payment stubs for the current month along with a brief essay on "Why I Even Bother to Go on Living."

A prominent contributor to the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* told me, "We created *Nie* by raising expectations and then refusing to fill them. Not so much now but early on we displayed a decided reluctance to explore our own side's shortcomings as vigorously as we once had those of the old Commies." A surprising number of others expressed grudging respect (alongside their general revulsion) for aspects of what Urban was up to with *Nie*. He was, people said, serving an undeniably useful function. The trouble was that virtually no one would go on the record with such comments. As a reporter, I'm used to situations where people who want to say something bad about somebody else will do so only off the record. This was the first time that sort of thing happened almost every single time anybody wanted to say something *nice*.

On my most recent trip to Poland, I decided, as usual, to visit Jerzy Urban, this time in *Nie's* new digs, which were considerably more splendid than the ones I had seen before. *Nie* (with a weekly circulation hovering near an astounding seven hundred and fifty thousand) had moved from its dingy third-floor walkup to a spacious and stylish villa along a quiet, tree-lined side street in Warsaw's embassy district. A pair of private security guards (variously referred to as Urban's commandos and his *goryle*) stood watch at the entry gate, probably with good reason.

Urban greeted me, even more incongruously svelte and dapper than usual, in a large, airy second-floor office and sat down behind a large, neat black circular desk. A breeze wafted in from the awning-shaded balcony behind him. On one wall was a striking framed image of a bright-yellow banana peeled back to reveal an exuberant penis within.

We began by talking about a recent and no doubt pleasant (from his point of view) turn of events: the parliamentary elections, which had seen a general repudiation of Solidarity's slate and a return to prominence of some of his former Communist-aligned allies ("the Velvet Restoration," as Michnik had taken to calling it)—a prefiguring of last month's Presidential outcome. A photograph that had been taken the night of the parliamentary elections, and had become famous, showed Urban celebrating with his old cohorts, buoyantly wielding a magnum of champagne, a bottle that was to other bottles what his ears are to other ears, and gleefully sticking out his tongue, which was proportionally huger than either. "Well," he said now, smiling. "I told you so—the girls and their nuns, as you see."

Our conversation turned to his various legal entanglements, including a defamation suit that he had brought against a Catholic right-wing historian from Lublin, named Ryszard Bender, who had had the gall to refer to Urban as "the Goebbels of martial law." The court went with Bender, but the verdict was overturned on appeal. Whether the analogy had genuinely stung or whether Urban was just nursing his sense of grievance for its evident publicity advantages was a bit unclear; he was laughing as he recounted the incident. He seemed decidedly more perturbed by a recent item in a Silesian tabloid called *Panorama*, which alleged that Urban had been spotted in church, *praying*, and claimed that, having suddenly come to his senses, he was about to come out in opposition to abortion after all. "Now, *that* definitely calls for a lawsuit," he said grimly. "I mean, I can't very well be expected to tolerate such a flagrant sullying of my good name."

Then we began talking about *Nie*. I

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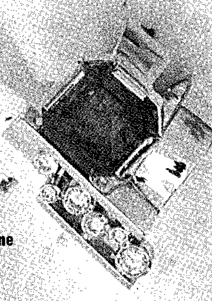

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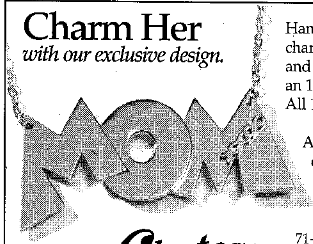
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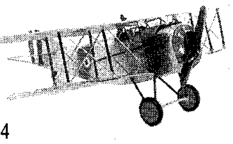
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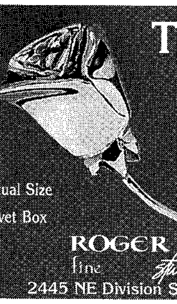
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asked him about his favorite stories, and he mentioned the abortion-reward offer, various Walesa debunkings, some of the sexual "public-service interventions," as he calls them. But he went on to say that the thing he really loved doing in *Nie* was what he called "happenings": semi-staged or "Candid Camera"-style provocations. "For example, the time we went to a little village in the western interior of the country claiming to represent various American joint-venture interests, and got the town leaders there to sell us their entire town, *including the church*," he said. "And then there was the time we announced how, in keeping with the new spirit of capitalism, I myself had recently taken my profits from *Nie* and purchased the rights to our country's national anthem, 'March, March Dabrowski!'—you know, this ridiculous piece you keep hearing all the time, ad nauseam. Well, we reported that I'd bought the rights for the equivalent of about one and a half million dollars and from now on anybody wishing to play or perform the piece would have to pay me ten thousand zlotys"—about seventy-five cents. "We gave out an address, and to my astonishment people began sending in their fees. I couldn't believe it. What am I saying, I couldn't believe it? Of course I could believe it—I can believe anything. *That's what I do.*"

Perhaps Urban's favorite "happening," though, was the time he conned the newly reopened luxury Hotel Bristol into getting itself certified kosher. He pulled out an issue of *Nie* and, turning to a photo spread, showed me how an actor—or, rather, a young actress—had been disguised as a hunched, bearded, and bedraggled old rabbi and had been driven to the hotel in Urban's Jaguar; and how the "rabbi" had dragged the hotel's prim-and-proper female business manager all around the establishment, peppering her with arch questions.

"It was great," Urban declared. "We made a complete fool of this business-manager lady." ("Yeah, she's probably committed suicide by now," one of my friends subsequently commented. I asked what she had done to deserve such treatment. "Oh, her just being a woman is generally provocation enough for Urban," my friend replied.) Urban continued, "And here the rabbi is signing the certificate—look at the manager, look at how tense she is. It's hilarious. And then here we have the rabbi being escorted back to my Jaguar, and then here . . ." Urban was speechless with satisfaction: the last picture showed the "rabbi" back in the Jaguar, a few blocks away, her black coat removed, her white shirt opened, her beard gingerly pulled aside as she breast-feeds her child. The photograph was captioned "*Rabin z dzieciatkiem*," the latter being a word for "child" used almost exclusively in the expression "Madonna and Child." It was a combination of image and caption almost precision-engineered to fry every nationalist circuit in the Polish imagination. Urban smiled broadly and declared his labors good.

"So, it's getting to be time for our editorial-board meeting," he said. "You're welcome to join us." On the way downstairs, he also invited me to have dinner that evening at his villa.

The staff was gathering in the conference room. There were a few recognizable faces, including one of the martial-law regime's most notorious television-news apologists, but mainly there were young, eager, aggressive, and vaguely slaphappy novices. Urban, comfortably ensconced among them, seemed magisterial, a *grand seigneur* in his element—a contented man. He began by announcing that a vodka-tasting would immediately follow the meeting; turning to me, he explained that, just as one company had its Chopin-brand vodka, another was proposing to market Urban vodka, so they were all going to sample the product. Then they launched into a traditional brainstorming session, with, I suppose, a difference.

"I don't really think we should do too many more of those priest-fucking stories," Urban declared. "People are getting tired of priests fucking. What they want nowadays is priests embezzling, priests with dollars. Let's see if we can generate a few more of those. And, anyway, we still seem to have a monopoly on Pope-bashing—nobody so far has dared to join in with us on that."

THAT evening, on the drive out to Urban's new villa, in the village of Konstancin, an old suburb of sanatoriums and spas nestled in the pinewoods about half an hour south of Warsaw, I began wondering about Urban at the editorial meeting. Could he really be that contented? The calibre of the staff:

eager young hacks, tired old apologists, second- and third-stringers . . . This man used to virtually run *Polityka*, surrounded by the very best of Polish journalism and drawing on some of the biggest names of the Eastern European intelligentsia. Surely he must sense how far he has fallen. And yet . . .

The taxi pulled up to Urban's walled compound. Private armed guards approached the cab from a video-camera-equipped entry shed, examined my papers, and ushered me in. Urban himself was there to greet me on the other side of the gate, freshly scrubbed and crisply, if casually, dressed in Armani jeans and a capacious olive-green cotton T-shirt. As we ambled up the gravel driveway toward the year-old, California-moderne-style mansion, he genially told me a bit about the neighborhood. Boleslaw Bierut, the Stalinist-era dictator, had had a villa a few lots down the way, he said, whereas this property used to belong to—he broke into one of his wide, mischievous grins—a cousin of the regime's veteran opponent, the late Cardinal Wyszynski. At the head of the driveway, his sleek olive Jaguar XJ6 was snugly slotted into the carport. Along the entire length of the carport's interior wall, just above the Jaguar, stretched a sublime socialist-realist panel depicting Lenin exhorting the workers. Urban's grin grew even wider.

The walls of the villa teemed with conventionally adventurous paintings (Picassoesque nudes, surreal dreamscapes), and there was an amply stocked bar. Urban's third wife, Malgorzata Daniszewska, joined us, a cheerful, apple-cheeked, zaftig woman in her mid-forties.

The Urbans escorted me out to their back patio, where a table was laid in a casually elegant style and, in the warm evening, servants floated back and forth with generous servings of wine and gazpacho and Swedish meatballs. A violet-light electric insect trap hung from a rafter, occasionally zapping the stray mosquito. The first time this happened, Urban caught me gazing up, momentarily disconcerted. "Crematoria," he said, smiling.

I asked him about the often mentioned irony of a former official of a Communist regime living in such luxury. "Oh, you know, it doesn't mean that I suddenly became a talented businessman," he said. "It's just that I started making money on what I always knew how to do anyway, which is to edit a newspaper. Before, the profits devolved to the Party; now they come directly to me. That's the only difference."

Occasionally, stabs of light pierced the distant woods—the flashlights of guards on patrol. Urban recounted a series of stories from some of his recent trips abroad, including a Manhattan dinner, back in his press-spokesman days, with a childhood chum, Jerzy Kosinski (at the time, the only émigré who would deign to sup with him). Generally, he noted, he really didn't enjoy travel. "It's strange for me to be in places where I'm not immediately recognized by everyone," he said. "And, I must say, not an entirely pleasant sensation."

"So," I said to Urban as we sat sipping our after-dinner liqueurs, "would you say you have lived a happy life?"

"*Absolutely*," he shot back emphatically, without a moment's hesitation. "Are you kidding? I mean, think about it. In the fifties, I was young and deeply embroiled in the opposition, with *Po Prostu*, and I had all that excitement and prestige. In the seventies, I was at the heart of *Polityka*, one of the foremost intellectual journals of its time in Eastern Europe—maybe even anywhere in the world—and I had all that satisfaction. In the eighties, I was in the government, in the middle of history, and I got to have all that influence. And now, today"—he gestured expansively about him—"I have all this. I mean, what other pleasures could I long for?"

"But those are contradictory pleasures," I pointed out. "You can't very well take satisfaction in having once been in the opposition and then take pleasure in having been part of a government that went and jailed all your old allies from that opposition."

"And why not?" Urban countered. "One wouldn't want to experience just one kind of pleasure in one's life. One wants to sample all different kinds of pleasure." ♦

### OUR EVOLVING IDIOMS

[*From the Times*]

When pressed on the issue, for example, Ms. Myers said she did not think Mr. Clinton should soften his stance.

Republican plans to balance the budget in seven years would "make older people and the disabled suffer," she said, adding, "I don't trust Gingrich farther than you can bat an eye."

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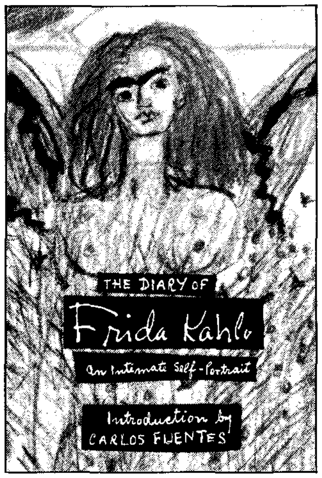

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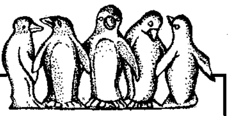

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## PERSONAL HISTORY

# SLIPPED AWAY

*At fifty-three, the novelist remembers his first love: wrestling.*

BY JOHN IRVING

IN my prep-school days, at Exeter, from 1956 to 1961, creative writing wasn't taught—the essay was all-important there—but in my years at the academy I nevertheless wrote more short stories than anything else; I showed them (out of class) to George Bennett, my best friend's father, who was chairman of the English Department. He was my first critic and encourager—I needed his help. Because I failed both Latin and math, I was required to remain at the academy for an unprecedented fifth year; yet in my fourth year I qualified for a course called English 4W—the "W" stood for writing of the kind I wanted to do—and in this selective gathering I was urged to be creative, which I rarely managed to be.

In my memory, which is subject to doubt, the star author and most outspoken critic in English 4W was my wrestling teammate Chuck Krulak, who was also known as Brute, and who would become General Charles C. Krulak—the Commandant of the Marine Corps and a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. No less a presence, and as sarcastic a critic as the future General, was my classmate in English 5, the future writer G. W. S. Trow; he was just plain George then, but he was as sharp as a ferret—I feared his bite. Recently, when I was speaking with George, he surprised me by saying he'd been deeply unhappy at Exeter; he had always struck me as being too confident to be unhappy—whereas my own state of mind at the time was one of perpetual embarrassment.

I could never have qualified for Exeter through normal admissions procedures; I was a mediocre student—as it turned out, I was dyslexic, but no one knew this at the time. Nevertheless, I was automatically admitted in the category of faculty child. My father taught in the History Department; he'd majored in Slavic languages and literature at Harvard, and he was the first to teach Russian history at Exeter. I initiated a heightened level of intrafamily awkwardness by enrolling in his Russian-history course. Dad rewarded me with a C-plus.

To say that Exeter was hard for me is an understatement. I was the only student in my genetics class who failed to control his fruit-fly experiment. The Red Eyes and the White Eyes were interbreeding so rapidly that I lost track of the generations. I attempted to dispose of the evidence in the drinking fountain outside the lab, not knowing that fruit flies could live for days in the water pipes. When the unusable drinking fountain was declared "contaminated"—it was literally crawling with wet fruit flies—I crawled forth and made my confession.

I was forgiven by Mr. Mayo-Smith, the biologist who taught genetics, because I was the only "townie" (that is, resident of Exeter) in any of his classes who owned a gun. Boarding students, quite understandably, were not allowed firearms. But as a New Hampshire native—"Live Free or Die," as the license plates say—I had an arsenal of weapons at my disposal; the biologist used me as the marksman who provided his introductory biology class with pigeons. I used to shoot them off the roof of his barn. Fortunately, he lived some distance from town.

Yet even in my capacity as Mr. Mayo-Smith's marksman I was a failure. He wanted the pigeons killed immediately after they'd eaten; that way the students who dissected them could examine the food contained in their crops. And so I allowed the pigeons to feed in the biologist's cornfield. When I flushed them from the field, they were so stupid they always flew to the roof of his barn. It was a slate roof; when I picked them off (I used a 4X scope and a .22 long-rifle bullet, being careful not to shoot them in their crops), they slid down one side of the roof or the other. One day, I shot a hole in the roof; after that, Mr. Mayo-Smith never let me forget how his barn leaked. The fruit flies in the drinking fountain were the school's problem, but I had shot the biologist's very own barn—"Personal property, and all that that entails," as my father was fond of saying in Russian history.

Yet shooting a hole in Mr. Mayo-Smith's barn was less humiliating than the years I spent in language therapy. At Exeter, poor spelling was unknown—I mean that little was known about it. It was my dyslexia, of course, but—because that diagnosis wasn't available in the late fifties and early sixties—bad spelling like mine was considered a psychological problem by the language therapist who evaluated my mysterious case. When the repeated courses of language therapy were judged to have had no discernible influence on my ability to recognize the difference between "allegory" and "allergy," I was turned over to the school psychiatrist.

Did I hate the school?

"No." (I had grown up at the school!)

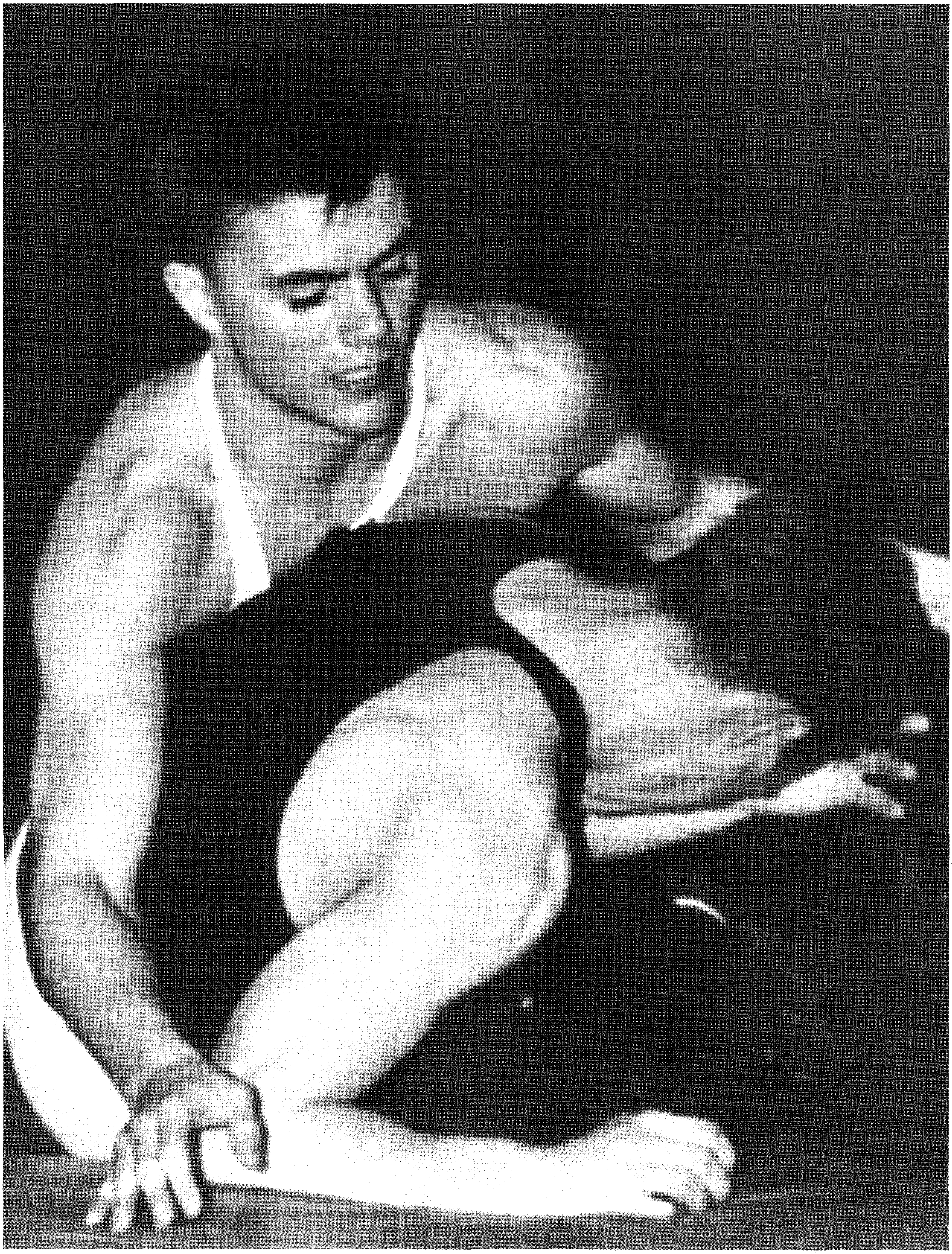
Why did I refer to my stepfather as my "father"?

"Because I love him, and he's the only 'father' I've ever known."

But why was I "defensive" on the subject of other people calling my "father" my "stepfather"?

"Because I love him, and he's the

COURTESY OF PHILLIPS EXETER ACADEMY YEARBOOK 1961



*John Irving (top) in 1961. "There was one place at Exeter where I was never angry: the wrestling room."*

only 'father' I've ever known—why shouldn't I be 'defensive'?"

Why was I angry?

"Because I can't spell."

But why *couldn't* I spell?

"Search me."

Was it "difficult" having my stepfather—that is, my father—as a teacher?

"I had my father as a teacher for one year. I've been at the school, and a bad speller, for five years."

But why was I angry?

"Because I can't spell—and I have to see *you.*"

"We certainly *are* angry, aren't we?" the psychiatrist said.

"I certainly *are,*" I said.

THERE was one place at Exeter where I was never angry. I never lost my temper in the wrestling room—possibly because I wasn't embarrassed to be there. It is surprising that I felt so comfortable with wrestling. My athletic skills had never been significant. I had loathed Little League baseball. (By association, I hate all sports with balls.) I more mildly disliked skiing and skating. (I have a limited tolerance for cold weather.) I did have an inexplicable taste for physical contact, for the adrenal stimulation of bumping into people, but I was too small to play football. (Also, there was a ball involved.)

When you love something, you have the capacity to bore everyone about *why*—it doesn't matter why. Wrestling, like boxing, is a weight-class sport; you get to bump into people your own size. You can bump into them very hard, but the place where you land is reasonably soft. And there are civilized aspects to the sport's combativeness: I've always admired the rule that holds you responsible, *if* you lift your opponent off the mat, for your opponent's "safe return." But the best answer to why I love wrestling is that it was the first thing I was any good at. And what limited success I had in the sport I owe to my first coach, Ted Seabrooke.

Coach Seabrooke had been a Big Ten champion and a two-time All-American at Illinois; he was *way* overqualified for the job of coaching wrestling at Exeter, and his teams dominated New England prep-school and high-school wrestling for years. An N.C.A.A. runner-up at 155 pounds, Ted Seabrooke was a handsome man; he weighed upward of two hundred in my time at Exeter. He would sit on the mat with his legs spread in front of him; his arms were bent at the elbow but reaching out to you from the level of his chest. Even in such a vulnerable position, he could completely defend himself; I never saw anyone manage to get behind him. On his rump, he could scuttle like a crab—his feet tripping you, his legs scissoring you, his hands tying up your hands or snapping your head down. He could control you by holding you in his lap (a crab ride) or by taking possession of your near leg and your far arm (a cross-body ride); he was always gentle with you, and he never seemed to expend much energy in the process of frustrating you. (Coach Seabrooke was thirty-six when he began coaching me; he would first get diabetes, and then die of cancer at the age of fifty-nine. At his memorial service, I couldn't speak half the eulogy I'd written for him, because I knew by heart the parts that would make me cry if I tried to say them aloud.)

Not only did Ted Seabrooke teach me how to wrestle; more important, he warned me that I would never be better than "halfway decent" as a wrestler because of my limitations as an athlete. He also impressed upon me how I could compensate for my shortcomings: I had to be especially dedicated—a thorough student of the sport—if I wished to overcome my lack of any observable ability. "Talent is overrated," Ted told me. "That you're not very talented needn't be the end of it."

A high-school wrestling match is six minutes long, divided into three two-minute periods, with no rest between the periods. In the first period, both wrestlers start on their feet—a neutral position, with neither wrestler having an advantage. In the second period, in those days, one wrestler had the choice of taking the top or the bottom position; in the third period, the other wrestler had the choice. (Nowadays, the options of choice have been expanded to include the neutral position, and the wrestler given the choice in the second period may defer his choice until the third.)

What Coach Seabrooke taught me was that I should keep the score close through the first two periods—close enough so that one takedown or a reversal in the third period could win the match. And I needed to avoid "mix-ups"—free-for-all situations that were

## ALIEN NATION

I think I'm around the wrong people today.
Though I know their cousins (who say I'm nice),
veiling their faces they tiptoe away—
some impassive, some afraid,
and others grumbling that they'd
sooner fillet me than talk to me twice.

And look! in the wind that blows where it lists,
their gun ports blazing wide open,
sail phrenic experts and therapists,
miracle workers, psyche massagers,
waving their hand-sewn Jolly Rogers.
All-merciful, unthinking (but compassionate) One,

what on earth, exactly, provoked You to melt
the blanket of snow that pacified
the scrofulations of this blistering veldt
with a cold as keen and sweet
to the tongue as the coconut's meat
and made it strange enough to walk inside?

—Vijay Seshadri

not in either wrestler's control. (The outcome of such a scramble favors the better athlete.) Controlling the pace of the match—a combination of technique, correct position, and physical conditioning—was my objective. I know it sounds boring—I was a boring wrestler. The pace that worked for me was slow. I liked a low-scoring match.

I rarely won by a fall, which is also called a "pin" and refers to a match termination: you hold both shoulders of your opponent flat to the mat for two seconds. In five years of wrestling at Exeter, I probably pinned no more than a half-dozen opponents. I was almost never pinned—only twice, in fact. I won 5–2 when I dominated an opponent; I won 2–1 or 3–2 when I was lucky, and lost 3–2 or 4–3 when I was less lucky. If I got the first takedown, I could usually win; if I lost the first takedown, I was hard pressed to recover—I was not a come-from-behind man. I was, as Coach Seabrooke said, "halfway decent" as a counter-wrestler, too. But if my opponent was a superior athlete, I couldn't afford to rely on my countermoves to his first shots. My counters weren't quick enough—my *reflexes* weren't quick enough. Against a superior athlete, I would take the first shot; against a superior *wrestler*, I would try to counter his first move.

"Or vice versa, if it's not working," Coach Seabrooke used to say. He had a sense of humor. "Where the head goes, the body must follow—usually," he would add. And: "An underdog is in a position to take a healthy bite."

This was a concept of myself that I'd been lacking. I was an underdog; therefore, I had to control the pace—of *everything*. This was more than I learned in English 4W, but the concept was applicable to my creative writing—to all my schoolwork, too. If my classmates could read our history assignment in an hour, I allowed myself two or three. If I couldn't learn to spell, I would keep a list of my most frequently misspelled words, and I kept the list with me; I had it handy even for unannounced quizzes. Most of all, I rewrote everything. First drafts were like the first time you tried a new takedown—you needed to drill it over and over again before you even dreamed of trying it in a match. I began to take my lack of talent seriously.

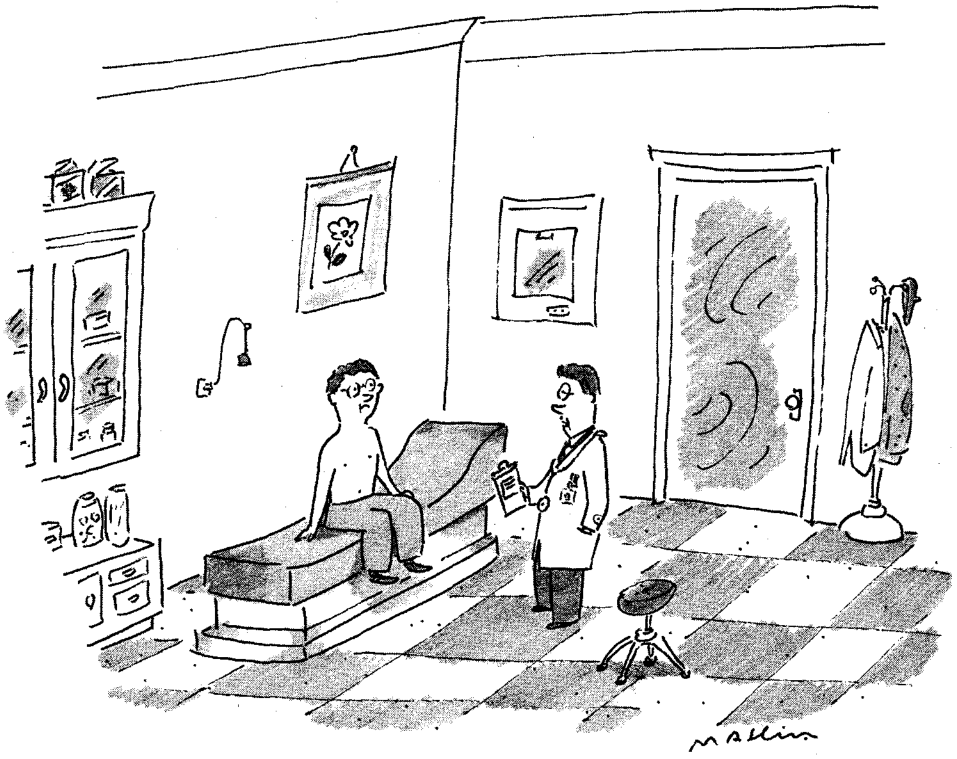
An imperious Spanish teacher was fond of abusing those of us who lacked perfection with the insensitive (not to mention élitist) remark that we would all end up at Wichita State. I didn't know that Wichita was in Kansas; I knew only that this was a slur—if we weren't *talented* enough for Harvard, then Wichita State would be our just reward. Fuck you, I thought: my objective would then be to do well at Wichita State. Ted Seabrooke had gone to Illinois. I didn't suppose that this Spanish teacher thought too highly of Illinois, either.

I remember telling Ted that I'd had two likable Spanish teachers, and one unlikable one. "I wouldn't complain about those odds," he said.

MY time at the academy was marked by two important transitions in Exeter wrestling. First, the wrestling room was moved from the basement of the old gymnasium to the upper reaches of the indoor track, which was called "the cage." The new room, high in the rafters, was exceedingly warm; from the hard-packed dirt of the track below us, and from the wooden track that circumscribed the upper level, came the steady pounding of the runners. But once our wrestling practice was under way, we wrestlers never heard the runners. The wrestling room was sealed off from the wooden track by a heavy sliding door, which was closed during practice.

The other wrestling-related change was in the mats themselves. I began wrestling on horsehair mats, which were covered with a filmy, flexible plastic; as a preventive measure against mat burns, this plastic sheeting was modestly effective, but—like the sheet on a bed—it loosened with activity. The loose folds were a cause of ankle injuries; also, the shock-absorbing abilities of those old horsehair mats were nonexistent in comparison to the comfort of the new mats that arrived at Exeter in time to be installed in the new wrestling room.

The new mats were smooth on the surface, with no cover. When the mats were warm, you could drop an egg from knee height and the egg wouldn't break. (Whenever someone tried this and the egg broke, we said that the mat wasn't warm enough.) On a cold gym floor, the texture of the mat would radi-



*"To relieve the pressure of your medical bills, I'm going to recommend that we go ahead and drain your savings account."*

cally change. Later, I kept a wrestling mat in my unheated Vermont barn; in midwinter the mat was as hard as a floor.

Most of our dual-meet matches were also held in the cage, but not in the wrestling room where we practiced. An L-shaped wooden parapet extended like an arm off the wooden track. From this vantage—and from a loop of the wooden track itself—as many as two hundred or three hundred spectators could look down upon a less than regulation-size basketball court, where we rolled out the mats. There was barely enough floor space left over for a dozen or more rows of bleacher seats; most of our fans were above us, on the wooden track and parapet. It was like wrestling at the bottom of a teacup; the surrounding crowd peered over the rim of the cup.

The place where we wrestled was appropriately called "the pit." The smell of dirt from the nearby track was strangely remindful of summer, although wrestling is a winter sport. What with the constant opening of the outside door, the pit was never a warm place; the mats, which were so warm and soft in the wrestling room, were cold and hard for the competition. And when our wrestling meets coincided with track meets in the cage, the sound of the starting gun reverberated in the pit. I always wondered what the visiting wrestlers thought of the gunfire.

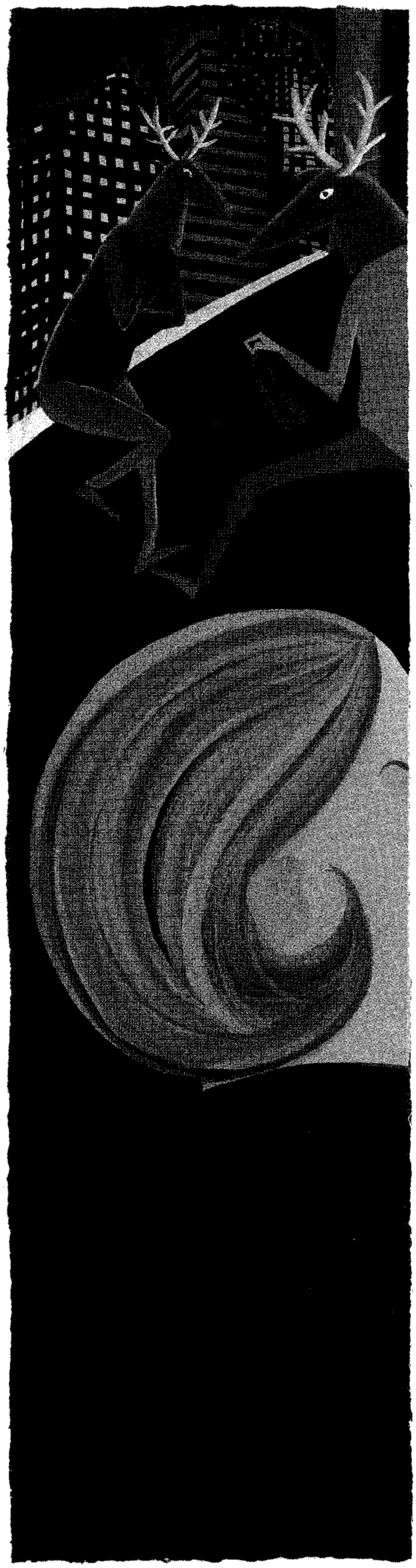
My first match in the pit was a learning experience. First-year wrestlers, or even second-year wrestlers, are not often starters on prep-school or high-school wrestling teams of any competitive quality. In New Hampshire, in the fifties, wrestling—unlike baseball or basketball or hockey or skiing—was not something every kid grew up doing. There are certain illogical things to learn about any sport; wrestling, especially, does not come naturally. A double-leg takedown is *not* like a head-on tackle in football. Wrestling is not about knocking a man down—it's about controlling him. To take a man down by his legs, you have to do more than knock his legs out from under him: you have to get your hips under him, so that you can lift him off the mat before you put him down—and this is only one example. Suffice it to say that a first-year wrestler is at a considerable disadvantage when wrestling anyone with experience—regardless of how physically strong or well conditioned the first-year wrestler is.

I forget the exact combination of illness or injury or death in the family (or all three) that led to my first match in the pit. As a first-year wrestler, I was quite content to practice wrestling with other first-year or second-year wrestlers; the prospect of competition outside the wrestling room frightened me. There was a "ladder" posted in the wrestling room, where we were listed by weight class; in my first year, at 133 pounds, I would have been as low as fourth or fifth on the ladder. But the varsity man was sick or hurt, and the junior-varsity man failed to make weight—and possibly the boy who was next in line had gone home for the weekend because his parents were divorcing. Who knows? For whatever reason, I was the best available body in the 133-pound class.

I was informed of this unwelcome news in the dining hall, where I was substituting for a sick friend who worked as a waiter at a faculty table; fortunately, I had not yet eaten my breakfast—I would have had to vomit it up. As it was, I was four pounds over the weight class, and I ran for almost an hour on the wooden track of the indoor cage, in a ski parka and other winter clothing. Then I skipped rope in the wrestling room for half an hour, wearing a rubber suit with a hooded sweatshirt over it. I was an eighth of a pound under 133 at the weigh-ins, where I had my first look at my opponent—Vincent Buonomano, a defending New England champion from Mt. Pleasant High School, in Providence, Rhode Island.

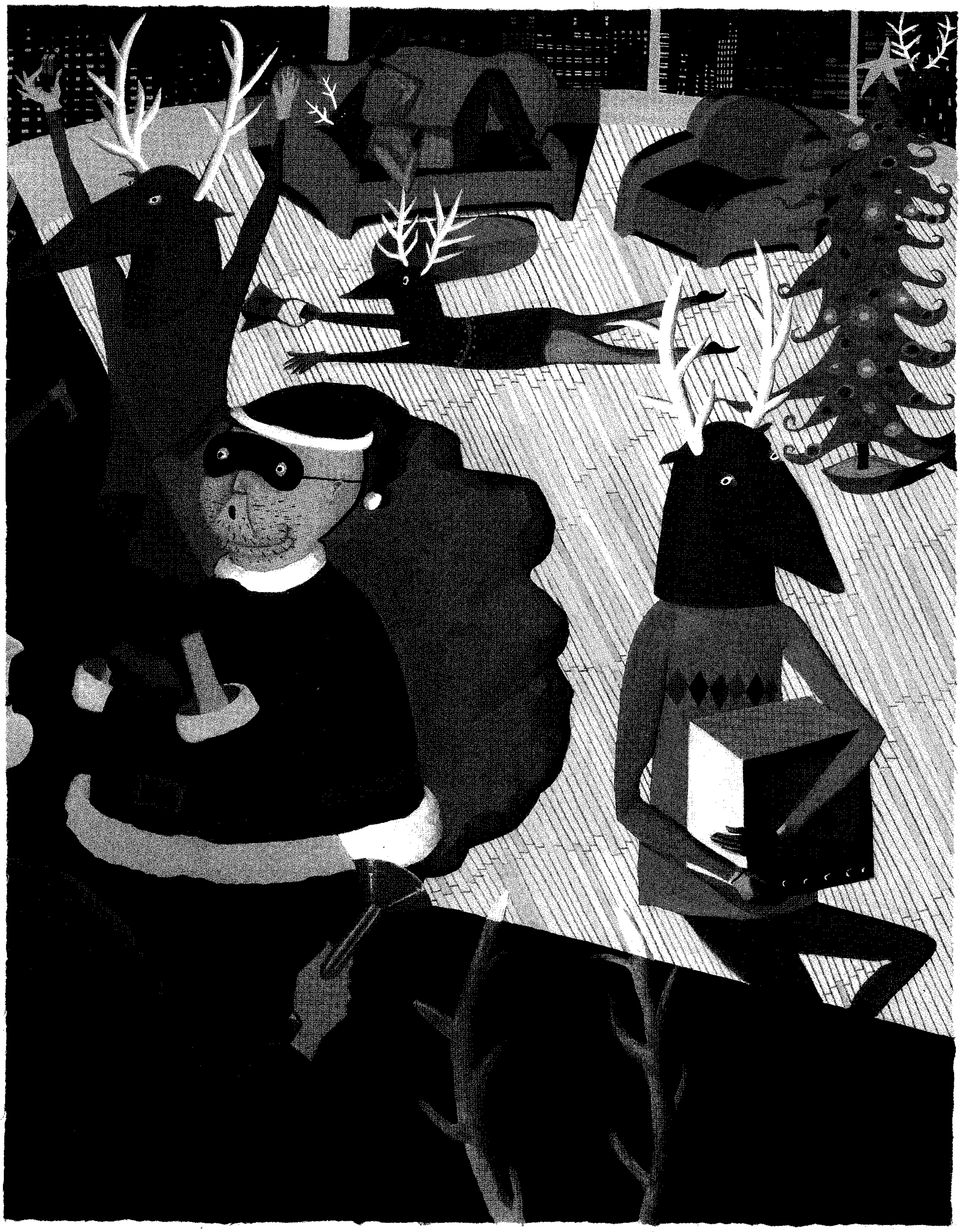
Had we forfeited the weight class, we could not have done worse: a forfeit counts the same as a pin—six points. It was Coach Seabrooke's hope that I wouldn't be pinned. In those days, a loss by decision was only a three-point loss for the team, regardless of how lopsided the score of the individual match. My goal, in other words, was to take a beating and lose the team only three points instead of six.

For the first fifteen or twenty seconds, this goal seemed feasible; then I was taken down, to my back, and I spent the remainder of the period in a neck bridge—I had a strong neck. The choice was mine in the second period: on Coach Seabrooke's advice, I chose the



EASEL · BY KATHY OSBORN

# BREAKING AND ENTERING



top position. (I was barely surviving on the bottom.) But Buonomano reversed me immediately, and so I spent the better part of the second period fighting off my back, too. My only points were for escapes—unearned, because Buonomano let me go; he was guessing it might be easier to pin me directly following a takedown. One such takedown dropped me on my nose—both my hands were trapped, so that I couldn't break my fall. (It's true what they say about "seeing stars.")

When a wrestling match is interrupted to stop bleeding, there's no clock counting the injury time; you can't fake bleeding. For other injuries, a wrestler is allowed no more than ninety seconds of injury time—accumulated in the course of the match. After a couple of minutes, when the trainer finished stuffing enough cotton up my nostrils to stanch the flow of blood, my dizziness had abated, and I looked at the time remaining on the match clock—only fifteen seconds! I had every confidence that I could stay off my back for another fifteen seconds, and I told Ted Seabrooke so.

"It's only the second period," Seabrooke said.

I survived the fifteen seconds but was pinned about midway into the third period—"With less than a minute to go," my mother lamentably told me.

The worst thing about being pinned in the pit was the lasting image of all those faces peering down at you. When you were winning, the fans were loud; when you were on your back, they were quiet, and their expressions were strangely incurious—as if they were already distancing themselves from your defeat.

I was never pinned in the pit again. The only other loss I remember there was by injury default: I broke my hand. When the trainer offered me the slop bucket—I needed to spit—I saw the orange rinds and a bloody towel in the bottom of the bucket, and I promptly fainted. Aside from that misfortune, and my first-ever match—with Mt. Pleasant's Vincent Buonomano—I associated the pit with winning; my best matches were there. It was in the pit that I wrestled Anthony Pierannunzi, of East Providence High School, to a 1–1 draw. I was not so lucky with Pierannunzi in the New England championship tournament, where he beat me two years in a row; despite two undefeated dual-meet seasons, I never won a New England title.

I remember my last bus ride with the Exeter team, to East Providence—to the home mats of my nemesis. I was the captain of the team that year (1961), and Exeter was the defending championship team—our '60 team was arguably the best in Exeter history. We'd checked our weight on the scales in the academy gym, at about five in the morning; we were all under our respective weight classes—in some cases, barely. The bus left Exeter in darkness, which near Boston gave way to a dense winter fog; the snow, the sky, the trees, the road—all were shades of gray.

Our 121-pounder, Larry Palmer, was worried about his weight. He'd been only a quarter of a pound under at Exeter—the official weigh-ins were at East Providence. What if the scales were different? (They weren't supposed to be.) I'd been a half pound under my 133-pound class; my mouth was dry, but I didn't dare drink any water—I was spitting into a paper cup. Larry was spitting into a cup, too. "Just don't eat," Coach Seabrooke told us. "Don't eat and don't drink—you're not going to gain weight on the bus."

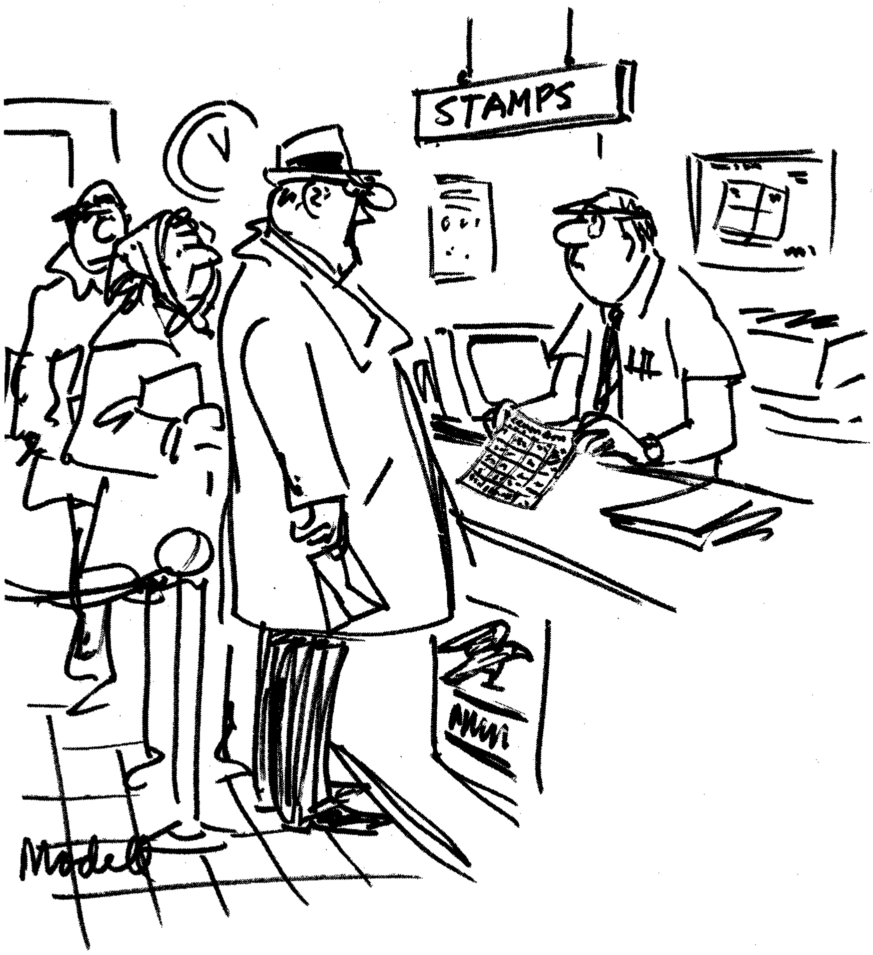
Somewhere south of Boston, we stopped at a Howard Johnson's. A few of our wrestlers were safely enough under their weight classes so that they could risk eating something; most of them at least got off the bus—to pee. I'd had nothing to eat or drink for about thirty-six hours; I knew I didn't dare to eat or drink anything; I knew I *couldn't* pee. Larry Palmer remembers eating "that fatal piece of toast."

Just the other day, we were remembering it together. "It was plain toast," Larry said. "No butter, no jam—I didn't even finish it."

"And nothing to drink?" I asked him.

"Not a drop," Larry said.

(Lately, we've been in the habit of



*"Do I look like somebody who wants Barney Google on his envelopes?"*

getting together at least once a year. Larry is a professor at Cornell Law School; one of his kids has just started wrestling. Two of my kids were New England Class A champions, and one of them was a prep-school All-American.)

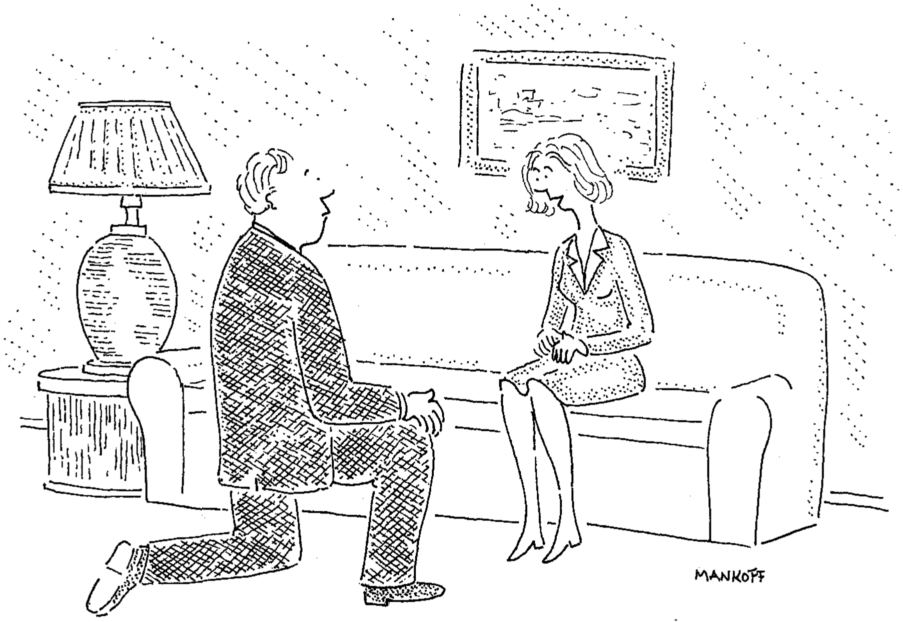
On the scales at East Providence, Palmer was a quarter pound over 121. He'd been a sure bet to get as far as the semifinals, and maybe farther; his disqualification cost us valuable team points—as did my loss to Pierannunzi, who was tougher at home than he was in the pit. In two years, Pierannunzi and I had wrestled four matches. I beat him once, we tied once, he beat me twice—both times in the tournament, where it counted most. All our matches were close, but that last time Pierannunzi pinned me. And Exeter failed to defend its New England team title.

Larry Palmer was stunned. He *couldn't* have eaten a half-pound piece of toast!

Coach Seabrooke was, as always, philosophical: "Don't blame yourself—you're probably just growing." Indeed, this proved to be the case. Palmer was the Exeter team captain the following year, 1962, when he won the New England Class A title at 147 pounds. More significant than his twenty-six-pound jump from his former 121-pound class, Palmer had also grown six inches.

It's clear to me now that Larry's famous piece of toast at Howard Johnson's didn't weigh half a pound. His growth spurt doubtless began on the bus. We were so sorry for him when he didn't make weight that none of us looked closely enough at him; in addition to gaining a half pound, Larry was probably two inches taller by the time he got to East Providence—we might have seen the difference, had we looked.

An intractable phenomenon of writing a memoir is that you begin to miss the people you are writing about. I found myself wanting to call up people I hadn't seen or spoken to in more than thirty years. It is now going on thirty-eight years since Vincent Buonomano pinned me in the pit with less than a minute remaining in the third period. On Memorial Day of this year, I tried to call him.



*"O.K., but what's our exit strategy?"*

• •

I speculated that after Buonomano had graduated from Mt. Pleasant High School, he'd never left the Providence area. I called information in Rhode Island and was informed that there was only one Vincent Buonomano in the environs of Providence; actually, he lived in Warwick. I made the call.

A girl answered; she sounded like a teen-ager. I asked for Vincent Buonomano. The girl said, "Who's calling?"

"He probably doesn't remember me," I said. "I haven't seen him since he was in high school."

She went off screaming for him. "Dad!" Or maybe it was "Daddy!" I had the impression of a large house and a large family.

Mr. Buonomano was very friendly to me on the phone, but he wasn't the same Vincent Buonomano who'd pinned me. The Mr. Buonomano on the phone said that he occasionally got calls for the other Buonomano, the wrestler, and once some bills for "the wrestler" had been sent to the wrong Buonomano's address. He told me that he thought the Buonomano I was looking for had gone to college and was now a physician—because one of the bills was seeking repayment of a student loan, and because another one of the bills was addressed to a Dr. Vincent Buonomano. (I speculated that he specialized in necks.) But I couldn't find him. He had slipped away, surely never remembering me.

It made me so sad, I simply had to call Anthony Pierannunzi. There was a greater likelihood that Pierannunzi would remember me, I thought: as I've said, all our matches were close. But the operator told me that there was no Anthony Pierannunzi in East Providence, and only one in Providence; it had to be him, I was certain. I called immediately. An extremely likable woman answered the phone. I instantly remembered Pierannunzi's girlfriend. (Or maybe it was his sister—she was a knockout, anyway.) I imagined I was talking to the high-school sweetheart of my archrival—now a devoted wife of thirty-plus years.

I said something like, "Is this the home of Anthony Pierannunzi, the wrestler?"

The woman laughed. "Lord, no," she said. She'd heard of the wrestler; there had been other phone calls—and, of course, bills sent to the wrong address. (Bills had become a common theme—they were perpetually being sent to the wrong address.) The woman told me that someone had once called her husband and asked him if he were *the* Anthony Pierannunzi. It was *the* Anthony Pierannunzi I was looking for, of course. But he had slipped away with Vincent Buonomano, neither of them ever knowing how important they were to me. ♦

## BRAVE NEW WORLD DEPT.

# GATES AT THE TEMPLE

*Bill Gates is striving onward with his vision of the future, but is he overlooking something?*

### BY JOHN SEABROOK

"MIND the wires, mind the wires," an usher was saying to two elderly people who had come to Congregation Rodeph Sholom last Monday night to hear Bill Gates speak. The usher pointed to three black cables snaking in from a generator on West Eighty-third Street. The temple, apparently, was not wired for multimedia presentations, but the crowd was. It contained Gates fans of all ages, from silver-haired matrons to three teen-age boys in front of me, who were talking very rapidly—kind of word-surfing off one another—about the relative merits of "I.S.P.s," or Internet service providers. Gates's laptop computer waited for him on the podium, its screen glowing, and flyers that had been distributed along the benches announced the evening's theme: "Special Event—William (Bill) Gates—'The Technological Future As I See It.' "

This is also the theme of Gates's new book, "The Road Ahead," and some people coming into the temple were carrying copies of it. "The Road Ahead" sounds like the title of a campaign biography, and in a sense that's what it is. Although Gates is not running for public office, he is seeking a leadership role in the new republic of networked computers, which he calls simply "the highway." The book, while it includes a brief memoir of Gates's role in the personal-computer revolution, is mostly an account of his vision of what the current revolution will bring. Reading it, one is dimly aware that Gates's vision is not neutral—as a technologist, he is in the business of inventing the future and then charging money for it. But the political and social implications of his view of the future are obscure, washed out in the golden glow of his optimism.

Audience members who'd already read the book knew what to expect from his talk: to Gates, the future looks very bright indeed. He says that the networked world will make people wealthier, happier, healthier, more sociable, more able to do what they want. It will solve traffic problems in crowded places and will make people who are alone and have nowhere to go feel connected. The world will be safer, more efficient, and full of really neat stuff, like the "wallet P.C.," which Gates, in a metaphor derived from his days as a Boy Scout, likens to a digital Swiss Army knife. Above all, the world will be "smart." Everything in your environment will be responsive to you and your needs. Gates's famous unfinished house, which he is building on the shore of Lake Washington, is an apt symbol of this vision. The house sounds like an enormous computer. Gates describes how visitors will be issued small electronic monitors to pin to their clothing, which will communicate with the brains of the house, and he goes on:

> When it's dark outside, the pin will cause a moving zone of light to accompany you through the house. Unoccupied rooms will be unlit. As you walk down a hallway, you might not notice the lights ahead of you gradually coming up to full brightness and the lights behind you fading. Music will move with you, too. It will seem to be everywhere, although, in fact, other people in the house will be hearing entirely different music or nothing at all. A movie or the news will be able to follow you around the house, too. If you get a phone call, only the handset nearest you will ring.

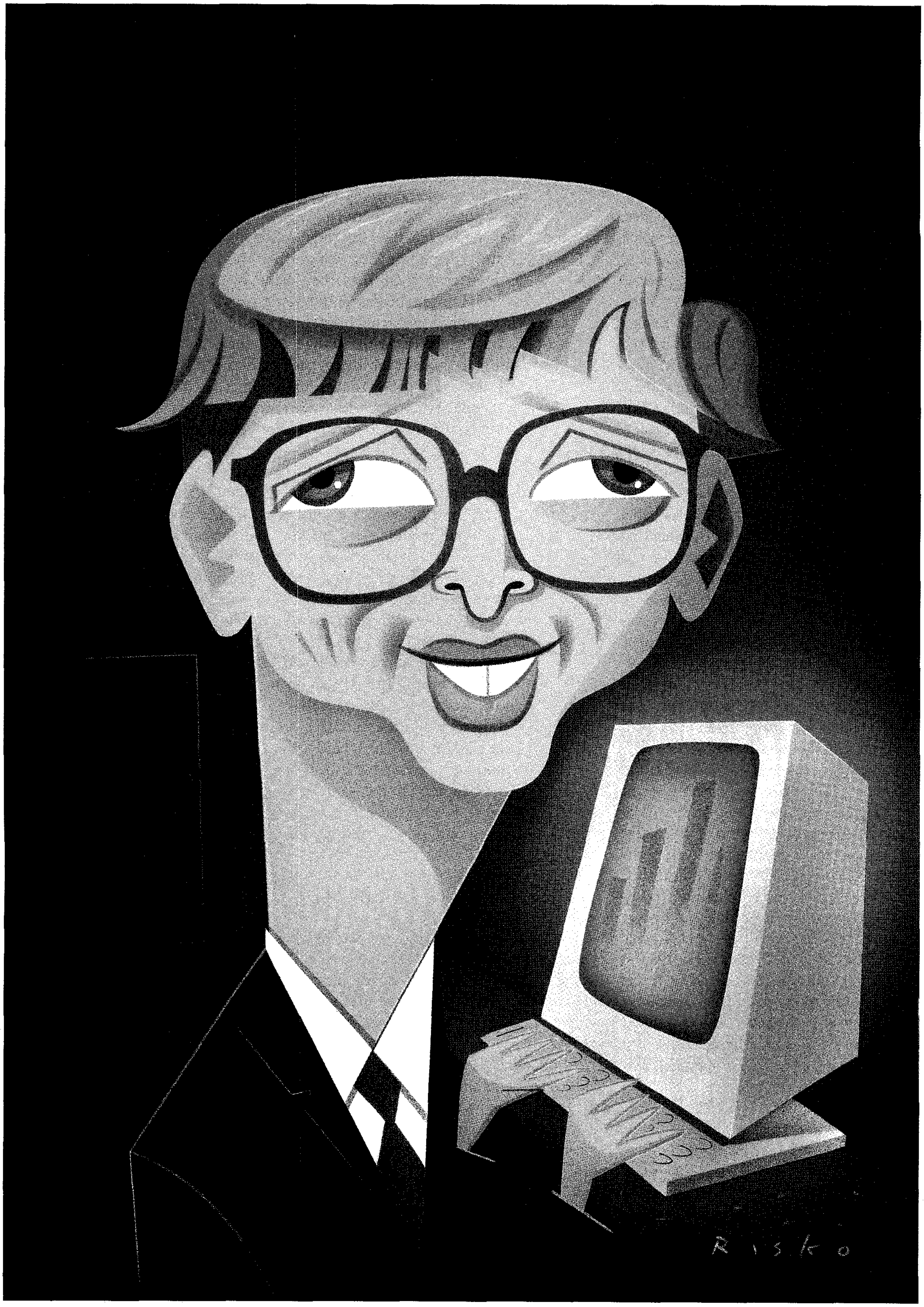
What's interesting about this idea for living is the image of the individual bathed in his own cone of light, absorbed in his personalized soundtrack: it expresses Gates's dream of an entirely personal relationship to technology. His achievement has been to make the world better conform to the needs of a person working alone, rather than to create spaces in which people coexist: he's not, at least instinctively, a "network" man. The question that Gates does not really address in "The Road Ahead" is, What happens when a bunch of isolated cones of light meet?

BY eight o'clock, the temple was jammed. Helaine Geismar Katz, of the 92nd Street Y, which sponsored the event, took the podium to introduce the chairman of Microsoft, and reminded the audience that the reason we were here tonight—the main reason people were interested in Gates's vision of the technological future—was that Gates had been so right about our technological past and present. He understood how popular the P.C. would be, at a time when the leaders of the computer industry completely missed it, and he had the great good fortune to leverage that basic insight into world power. Now that we were on the verge of another computer revolution, we were turning to a man with a track record as a visionary to tell us what it would look like.

The flaw in this logic, which is the assumption that the people who are the visionaries in one computer revolution are going to be the visionaries in the next one, may have been lost on some of the people in the audience, but it certainly wasn't lost on Gates. He began his talk by mentioning fallen giants of the computer industry; he has seen his predecessors slaughtered in front of him, and, in fact, has shared in the kill. Central shifts of insight about the nature of the computer, which in hindsight seem so obvious—like Gates's realization that supplying the software would be more important than supplying the hardware—almost always go unnoticed by the leaders of the industry at the time they are happening. At the moment of a computer visionary's greatest success (a moment like the one Gates was experiencing tonight), the seeds of his destruction are quietly being sown somewhere else.

Gates spoke from notes on the laptop, the light of the display blanching his face and reflecting in his glasses. Occasionally,

ROBERT RISKO


Risko

he would touch a button on his machine, and a large projection screen beside him would display graphic evidence of the tremendous forward march of P.C. sales or of computing power. But nothing in Gates's physical bearing suggested his immense authority; as a leader, he is at the opposite end of the spectrum from, say, Colin Powell. He seemed more in touch with his laptop than with the audience. Although Gates's speaking voice—which is high-pitched, hoarse, and breaks a lot—has a weary note of enthusiasm permanently etched into it, it has none of the quality that comes across in the E-mail voice of "billg," which has probably been the greatest vehicle for his genius. This voice—callow, beguilingly boyish, and full of intimate shorthand—shows up in isolated patches early in "The Road Ahead," where Gates is describing his first encounters with computers ("When I was a kid my image of computers was that they were very big and powerful. Banks had a bunch"), but it soon disappears, swallowed up in the august tones of the professional futurist. This is too bad. Not since Lincoln, perhaps, has an American leader so successfully used the written word to communicate with a large number of people. Gates has built and runs a software empire by filling countless electronic mailboxes with his late-night thoughts. He thrives in an in-between medium that is a combination of writing and speech—it's writing used *as* speech. The best thing about his "billg" persona is that it seems to be feeling its way along with you, at least when it talks about the future. Sadly, it's a persona that seems split off from the rest of Gates's current media personality.

One of the most compelling things about using E-mail—as opposed to participating in the real-time exchange of telephone chat—is that it allows you to maintain relationships with other people without disrupting your private relationship with your computer. It lets you stay inside your own cone of light, as it were—which is no doubt one of the reasons that Gates is so brilliant at it.

## PEIRE VIDAL

I saw the wolf in winter watching on the raw hill
I stood at night on top of the black tower and sang
I saw my mouth in spring float away on the river
I was a child in rooms where the furs were climbing
and each was alone and they had no eyes no faces
nothing inside them any more but the stories
they never breathed as they waved in their dreams of grass
and I sang the best songs that were sung in the world
as long as a song lasts they came by themselves to me
and I loved blades and boasting and shouting as I rode
as though I was the bright day flashing from everything
I loved being with women and their breath and their skin
and the thought of them that carried me like a wind
I uttered terrible things about other men
in a time when tongues were cut out to pay for kissing
but I set my sail for the island of Venus
and a niece of the Emperor in Constantinople
and I could have become the Emperor myself
I won and I won and all the women in the world
were in love with me and they wanted what I wanted
so I thought and every one of them deceived me
I was the greatest fool in the world I was the world's fool
I have been forgiven and have come home as I dreamed
and seen them all dancing and singing as the ship came in
and I have watched friends die and have worn black and cut off
the tails and ears of all my horses in mourning
and have shaved my head and the heads of my followers
I have been a poor man living in a rich man's house
and I have gone back to the mountains and for one woman
I have worn the fur of a wolf and the shepherds' dogs
have run me to earth and I have been left for dead
and have come back hearing them laughing and the furs
were hanging in the same places and I have seen
what is not there I have sung its song I have breathed
its day and it was nothing to you where were you

—W. S. MERWIN

WHEN Gates speaks about the future, it's clear that his understanding of it has a lot to do with the past. On page 3 of "The Road Ahead," there is a 1968 photograph of young Bill with his boyhood pal Paul Allen—with whom he later founded Microsoft—at Lakeside School, in Seattle. The fifteen-year-old Allen is seated at a terminal; the thirteen-year-old Gates is standing to one side and staring at the machine with a kind of feral alertness and deep fascination. You can see the source of Gates's vision—and of his place as a folk hero—in this boy's face. (It's the birth of "billg.") He was one of the first kids to feel what millions of kids younger than thirteen now feel every day as they enter a primal relationship with their own machines. "I realized later part of the appeal was that here was an enormous, expensive, grown-up machine and we, the kids, could control it," Gates writes, describing his first encounter with a computer. "We were too young to drive or to do any of the other fun-seeming adult activities, but we could give this big machine orders and it would always obey."

One reason Gates has remained so successful is that he has been able to hang on to this boyish fascination with the computer, and use it to guide his decisions about what new software tools Microsoft should develop and market for the P.C. But this same fascination with the P.C., which has been so fruitful up to now, may eventually prove to be Gates's undoing. In the new computer revolution—the one that is bringing the highway to ordinary life—the computer itself is less important than the computer network. "Connectivity" is more about groups of people working together than it is about one person giving the machine orders and having it obey. The way things are going, today's smart P.C.s may eventually evolve back into being dumb terminals, not unlike the kind of machine that Gates encountered at Lakeside in 1968. The brain—the smart part—will be the network itself.

It is not clear from Gates's book what he makes of the fact that the highway is far more than an application running on top of the P.C. Gates apparently did not see the Internet coming. He invested instead in CD-ROMs as the next big thing, thus allowing younger companies like Netscape, whose browsing software now dominates the Web, to become the major early presences on the highway. Microsoft is now trying to get into the game with the Microsoft Network; with its own Web browser, Internet Explorer; and with Blackbird, an on-line publishing tool kit. But in some ways the network is a threat to a company whose business is to supply software for P.C.s.

What seems to be happening is that software is getting softer: more people will be sharing it. Network-based programs such as Java, developed by Sun Microsystems, allow you to do things like view animated graphics on-line without owning the viewing program yourself. The idea behind this is a back-to-basics distribution of goods: if a lot of the things you do today on your personal computer were done on-line instead, then you wouldn't have to buy new versions of software like Windows 95, and you wouldn't need the megabytes to store them or the power to process them. You could just log on and borrow the network's assets.

If Bill Gates is not going to be the Bill Gates of the next phase in our digital lives, who will? Probably no one. The kind of control that Gates exerts over P.C.s and everything that goes with them is antithetical to the Net. All the really popular applications of network technology so far—E-mail, the Usenet newsgroups, and now the Web—arose from the bottom up, tweaked into life by dozens or hundreds of nameless idealists who were working for the good of the network itself. Many entrepreneurs are now trying to figure out how to capitalize on an environment in which all the really cool stuff is free, and some of them will make a lot of money—Jim Clark, the chairman of Netscape, recently became the first highway billionaire—but it is unlikely that we will ever see a lone highway man with the pervasive influence of Gates. The leaders of the next phase may not even come from the computer industry. They are likely to be people who understand that this new world is fundamentally not about technology.

Gates could probably have said something extremely interesting in his talk about how the trend toward networked computing will affect our view of privacy on-line, or about the social revolution that might occur because of the much cheaper access to computing power. Instead, as in his book, he settled for the rhetoric of optimism. "The Industrial Revolution was nothing compared to what we are talking about here," he said, and, "We don't call it a mania—we call it a gold rush." As for concerns about security and information overload: "Those things are being worked on." His faith in technological progress came across as so deep and so untroubled that it almost seemed like a religion, though not a religion for the technologically lame or the un-smart. The closest Gates came to discussing the information haves and have-nots was when he told a favorite anecdote. "Last week, I went out to dinner," he said. "Someone came up to me, asking me for money. I wasn't sure what to do. Then he said that I should look up his home page, and gave me his U.R.L. I didn't know if it was true or not, but it was such a good line I gave the guy five bucks. So he may be a homeless person with a home page."

Gates's E-mail persona showed through only once, at the end of the evening, when he read audience questions from slips of paper that had been passed up to him. One of them said, "Which of your competitors have the best strategies for the Internet?" Gates gave a pained laugh, and then responded in "billg" mode: "That's sort of like, Tell me where I'm going to die, and I'll be sure not to go there." ♦

*"He's very busy. One 'Good King Wenceslas,' and then out you go."*

## A REPORTER AT LARGE

# AIN'T NO MIDDLE CLASS

*The Mertens of Des Moines, Iowa, once considered themselves middle class. But now their debts outweigh their dreams—and they explain why so many Americans are faring worse than before.*

### BY SUSAN SHEEHAN

At ten o'clock on a Tuesday night in September, Bonita Merten gets home from her job as a nursing-home aide on the evening shift at the Luther Park Health Center, in Des Moines, Iowa. Home is a two-story, three-bedroom house in the predominantly working-class East Side section of the city. The house, drab on the outside, was built in 1905 for factory and railroad workers. It has aluminum siding painted an off-shade of green, with white and dark-brown trim. Usually, Bonita's sons—Christopher, who is sixteen, and David, who is twenty and still in high school (a slow learner, he was found to be suffering from autism when he was eight)—are awake when she comes home, but tonight they are asleep. Bonita's husband, Kenny, who has picked her up at the nursing home—"Driving makes Mama nervous," Kenny often says—loses no time in going to bed himself. Bonita is wearing her nursing-home uniform, which consists of a short-sleeved navy-blue polyester top with "Luther Park" inscribed in white, matching navy slacks, and white shoes. She takes off her work shoes, which she describes as "any kind I can pick up for ten or twelve dollars," puts on a pair of black boots and a pair of gloves, and goes out to the garage to get a pitchfork.

In the spring, Bonita planted a garden. She and David, who loves plants and flowers, have been picking strawberries, raspberries, tomatoes, and zucchini since June. Bonita's mother, who lives in Washington, Iowa, a small town about a hundred miles from Des Moines, has always had a large garden—this summer, she gave the Mertens dozens of tomatoes from her thirty-two tomato plants—but her row of potato plants, which had been bountiful in the past, didn't yield a single potato. This is the first year that Bonita has put potato plants in her own garden. A frost has been predicted, and she is afraid her potatoes (if there are any) will die, so instead of plunking herself down in front of the television set, as she customarily does after work, she goes out to tend her small potato strip alongside the house.

The night is cool and moonless. The only light in the back yard, which is a block from the round-the-clock thrum of Interstate 235, is provided by a tall mercury-arc lamp next to the garage. Traffic is steady on the freeway, but Bonita is used to the noise of the cars and trucks and doesn't hear a thing as she digs contentedly in the yellowy darkness. Bonita takes pleasure in the little things in life, and she excavates for potatoes with cheerful curiosity—"like I was digging for gold." Her pitchfork stabs and dents a large potato. Then, as she turns over the loosened dirt, she finds a second baking-size potato, says "Uh-huh!" to herself, and comes up with three smaller ones before calling it quits for the night.

"Twenty-two years ago, when Kenny and me got married, I agreed to marry him for richer or poorer," Bonita, who is forty-nine, says. "I don't have no regrets, but I didn't have no idea for how much poorer. Nineteen-ninety-five has been a hard year in a pretty hard life. We had our water shut off in July *and* in August, and we ain't never had it turned off even once before, so I look on those five potatoes as a sign of hope. Maybe our luck will change."

When Bonita told Kenny she was going out to dig up her potatoes, he remembers thinking, Let her have fun. If she got the ambition, great. I'm kinda out of hope and I'm tired.

KENNY MERTEN is almost always tired when he gets home, after 5 P.M., from his job at Bonnie's Barricades—a small company, started ten years ago by a woman named Bonnie Ruggless, that puts up barriers, sandbags, and signs to protect construction crews at road sites. Some days, he drives a truck a hundred and fifty miles to rural counties across the state to set up roadblocks. Other days, he does a lot of heavy lifting. "The heaviest sandbags weigh between thirty-five and forty pounds dry," he says. "Wet, they weigh fifty or sixty pounds, depending on how soaked they are. Sand holds a lot of water." Hauling the sandbags is not easy for Kenny, who contracted polio when he was eighteen months old and wore a brace on his left leg until he was almost twenty. He is now fifty-one, walks with a pronounced limp, and twists his left ankle easily. "Bonnie's got a big heart and hires people who are down on their luck," he says.

Kenny went to work at Bonnie's Barricades two years ago, and after two raises he earns seven dollars and thirty cents an hour. "It's a small living—too small for me, on account of all the debts I got," he says. "I'd like to quit working when I'm sixty-five, but Bonnie doesn't offer a retirement plan, so there's no way I can quit then, with twenty-eight years left to pay on the house mortgage, plus a car loan and etceteras. So I'm looking around for something easier—maybe driving a forklift in a warehouse. Something with better raises and fringe benefits."

On a summer afternoon after work, Kenny sits down in a rose-colored La-Z-Boy recliner in the Mertens' living room/dining room, turns on the TV—a nineteen-inch Sylvania color set he bought secondhand nine years ago for a hundred dollars—and watches local and national news until six-thirty, occasionally dozing off. After the newscasts, he gets out of his work uniform—navy-blue pants and a short-sleeved orange shirt with the word "Ken" over one shirt pocket and "Bonnie's Barricades" over the other—and takes a bath. The house has one bathroom, with a tub but no shower. Last Christmas, Bonita's mother and her three younger brothers gave the Mertens a shower for their basement, but it has yet to be hooked up—by Kenny, who, with the help of a friend, can do the work for much less than a licensed plumber.

Kenny's philosophy is: Never do today what can be put off until tomorrow—unless he really wants to do it. Not that he is physically lazy. If the Mertens' lawn needs mowing, he'll mow it, and the lawn of their elderly next-door neighbor, Eunice, as well. Sometimes he gets up at 4:30 A.M.—an hour earlier than necessary—if Larry, his half uncle, needs a ride to work. Larry, who lives in a rented apartment two miles from the Mertens and drives an old clunker that breaks down regularly, has been married and divorced several times and has paid a lot of money for child support over the years. He is a security guard at a tire company and makes five dollars an hour. "If he doesn't get to work, he'll lose his job," Kenny says. In addition, Kenny helps his half brother Bob, who is also divorced and paying child support, with lifts to work and with loans.

Around 7:30 P.M., Kenny, who has changed into a clean T-shirt and a pair of old jeans, fixes dinner for himself and his two sons. Dinner is often macaroni and cheese, or spaghetti with store-bought sauce or stewed tomatoes from Bonita's mother's garden. He doesn't prepare salad or a separate vegetable ("Sauce or stewed tomatoes *is* the vegetable," he says); dessert, which tends to be an Iowa brand of ice cream, Anderson Erickson, is a rare luxury. Kenny takes the boys out for Subway sandwiches whenever he gets "a hankering" for one. Once a week—most likely on Friday, when he gets paid—he takes them out for dinner, usually to McDonald's. "It's easier than cooking," Kenny says.

Because Bonita works the evening shift, Kenny spends more time with his sons than most fathers do; because she doesn't drive, he spends more time behind the wheel. Christopher, a short, trim, cute boy with hazel eyes and brown hair, is one badge away from becoming an Eagle Scout, and Kenny drives him to many Scouting activities. This summer, Kenny drove Eunice, who is eighty-five, to the hospital to visit her ninety-year-old husband, Tony, who had become seriously ill in August. After Tony's death, on September 12th, Kenny arranged for the funeral—choosing the casket and the flowers, buying a new shirt for Tony, and chauffeuring the boys to the private view-

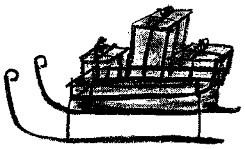
*Opposite: Christopher, Kenny, Bonita, and David Merten. Photograph by Annie Leibovitz.*

ing at the funeral home. "Everyone was real appreciative," he says.

At around eight-thirty on evenings free from special transportation duties, Kenny unwinds by watching more television, playing solitaire, dozing again, and drinking his third Pepsi of the day. (He is a self-described "Pepsiholic.") Around nine-fifty, he drives two miles to the Luther Park nursing home for Bonita.

BONITA MERTEN leaves the house before 1 P.M., carrying a sixteen-ounce bottle of Pepsi (she, too, is a Pepsiholic), and catches the bus to work. She is dressed in her navy-blue uniform and white shoes. Since the uniforms cost thirty-three dollars, Bonita considers herself lucky to have been given a used one by a nurse's aide who quit, and she bought another, secondhand, for ten dollars. Luther Park recently announced a mandatory change to forest-green uniforms, and Bonita does not look forward to having to shell out for new attire.

Bonita clocks in before one-forty-five, puts her Pepsi in the break-room refrigerator, and, with the other evening aides, makes rounds with the day aides. She and another aide are assigned to a wing with twenty long-term residents. "The residents have just been laid down on top of their beds before we get there," Bonita says. "First, I change water pitchers and give the residents ice—got to remember which ones don't want ice, just want plain water. We pass out snacks—shakes fortified with proteins and vitamins, in strawberry, vanilla, or chocolate. They need the shakes, because they ordinarily don't want to eat their meals. While I'm doing that, the other aide has to pass out the gowns, washrags, and towels, and the Chux—great big absorbent pads—and Dri-Prides. They're adult snap pants with liners that fit inside them. We don't call them diapers, because they're not actually diapers, and because residents got their pride to be considered."



At three-thirty, Bonita takes a ten-minute break and drinks some Pepsi. "We start getting the residents up and giving showers before our break and continue after," Bonita says. "Each resident gets two showers a week, and it works out so's I have to shower three patients a day."

One aide eats from four-thirty to five, the other from five to five-thirty. Until August 1st, Bonita bought a two-dollar meal ticket if she liked what was being offered in the employees' dining room. When the meal didn't appeal to her—she wouldn't spend the two dollars for, say, a turkey sandwich and a bowl of cream-of-mushroom soup ("I don't like it at all")—she either bought a bag of Chee-tos from a vending machine or skipped eating altogether. On August 1st, the nursing home reduced meal tickets to a dollar. "Even a turkey sandwich is worth that much," she says.

The residents eat at five-thirty, in their dining room. "We pass trays and help feed people who can't feed themselves," Bonita says. "Sometimes we feed them like a baby or encourage them to do as much as they can." At six-thirty, Bonita charts their meals—"what per cent they ate, how much they drank. They don't eat a whole lot, because they don't get a lot of exercise, either. We clear out the dining room and walk them or wheel them to their rooms. We lay them down, and we've got to wash them and position them. I always lay them on their side, because I like lying on my side. I put a pillow behind their back and a blanket between their legs. We take the false teeth out of those with false teeth, and put the dentures into a denture cup for those that will let us. A lot of them have mouthwash, and we're supposed to rinse their mouth. We're supposed to brush their teeth if they have them. After everyone is down, we chart. We check off that we positioned them and if we changed their liners. I'm supposed to get a ten-minute evening break, but I hardly ever take it. Charting, I'm off my feet, and there's just too much to do. Often we're short—I'll be alone on a hall for a few hours. The last thing we do is make rounds with the shift coming in. I clock out by nine-forty-five. Ninety-nine per cent of the time, Kenny picks me up. When I had different hours and he'd be bowling, his half brother Bob picked me up, or I took a cab for five dollars. The bus is one dollar, but it stops running by seven o'clock."

Bonita has worked all three shifts at Luther Park. The evening shift currently pays fifty cents an hour more than the day shift and fifty cents less than the night shift, but days and nights involve more lifting. (In moving her patients, Bonita has injured her back more times than she can remember, and she now wears a wide black belt with straps which goes around her sacroiliac; she also uses a mechanical device to help carry heavy residents between their wheelchairs and their beds.) Bonita's 1994 earnings from Luther Park were only eight hundred and sixty-nine dollars higher than her 1993 earnings, reflecting an hourly increase in wages from six dollars and fifty cents to six-sixty-five and some overtime hours and holidays, for which she is paid time and a half. This July 1st, she received the grandest raise that she has ever had in her life—seventy-five cents an hour—but she believes there is a hold-down on overtime, so she doesn't expect to earn substantially more in 1995. Luther Park gives her a ham for Easter, a turkey for Thanksgiving, ten dollars for her birthday, and twenty dollars for Christmas.

Bonita rarely complains about working at the nursing home. "I don't mind emptying bedpans or cleaning up the residents' messes," she says. She regards her job, with its time clocks, uniforms, tedious chores, low wages, penny-ante raises, and Dickensian holiday rewards, as "a means to a life."

BONITA AND KENNY MERTEN and their two sons live in a statistical land above the lowly welfare poor but far beneath the exalted rich. In 1994, they earned $31,216 between them. Kenny made $17,239 working for Bonnie's Barricades; Bonita made $13,977 at Luther Park. With an additional $1,212 income from other sources, including some money that Kenny withdrew from the retirement plan of a previous employer, the Mertens' gross income was $32,428. Last year, as in most other years of their marriage, the Mertens spent more than they earned.

The Mertens' story is distinctive, but it is also representative of what has happened to the working poor of their generation. In 1974, Kenny Merten was making roughly the same hourly wage that he is today, and was able to buy a new Chevrolet Nova for less than four thousand dollars; a similar vehicle today would cost fifteen thousand dollars—a sum that even Kenny, who is far more prone than Bonita to take on debt, might hesitate to finance. And though Kenny has brought on some of his own troubles by not always practicing thrift and by not always following principles of sound money management, his situation also reflects changing times.

In the nineteen-sixties, jobs for high-school graduates were plentiful. Young men could easily get work from one day to the next which paid a living wage, and that's what Kenny did at the time. By the mid-eighties, many of these jobs were gone. In Des Moines, the Rock Island Motor Transit Company (part of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad) went belly up. Borden moved out of the city, and so did a division of the Ford Motor Company. Utility companies also began downsizing, and many factory jobs were replaced by service-industry jobs, which paid less. Although there is a chronic shortage of nurse's aides at Luther Park, those who stay are not rewarded. After fifteen years of almost continuous employment, Bonita is paid seven dollars and forty cents an hour—fifty-five cents an hour more than new aides coming onto the job.

*"You find that surprising, or is it just your pierced eyebrow?"*

• •

Working for one employer, as men like Kenny's father-in-law used to do, is a novelty now. Des Moines has become one of the largest insurance cities in the United States, but the Mertens don't qualify for white-collar positions. Civil-service jobs, formerly held by high-school graduates, have become harder to obtain because of competition from college graduates, who face diminishing job opportunities themselves. Bonita's thirty-seven-year-old brother, Eugene, studied mechanical engineering at the University of Iowa, but after graduation he wasn't offered a position in his field. He went to work for a box company and later took the United States Postal Service exam. He passed. When Bonita and Kenny took the exam, they scored too low to be hired by the Post Office.

Although thirty-one per cent of America's four-person families earned less in 1994 than the Mertens did, Kenny and Bonita do not feel like members of the middle class, as they did years ago. "There ain't no middle class no more," Kenny says. "There's only rich and poor."

THIS is where the $32,428 that the Mertens grossed last year went. They paid $2,481 in federal income taxes. Their Iowa income-tax bill was $1,142, and $2,388 was withheld from their paychecks for Social Security and Medicare. These items reduced their disposable income to $26,417. In 1994, Bonita had $9.64 withheld from her biweekly paycheck for medical insurance, and $14.21 for dental insurance—a $620.10 annual cost. The insurance brought their disposable income down to $25,797.

The highest expenditures in the Mertens' budget were for food and household supplies, for which they spent approximately $110 a week at various stores and farmers' markets, for a yearly total of $5,720. They tried to economize by buying hamburger and chicken and by limiting their treats. (All four Mertens like potato chips.) Kenny spent about eight dollars per working day on breakfast (two doughnuts and a Pepsi), lunch (a double cheeseburger or a chicken sandwich), and sodas on the road—an additional two thousand dollars annually. His weekly dinner out at McDonald's with his sons cost between eleven and twelve dollars—six hundred dollars a year more. Bonita's meals or snacks at work added up to about three hundred dollars. Kenny sometimes went out to breakfast on Saturday—alone or with the boys—and the meals he and his sons ate at McDonald's or Subway and the dinners that all four Mertens ate at restaurants like Bonanza and Denny's probably came to another six hundred dollars annually. David and Christopher's school lunches cost a dollar-fifty a day; they received allowances of ten dollars a week each, and that provided them with an extra two dollars and fifty cents to spend. The money the boys paid for food outside the house came to five hundred dollars a year. The family spent a total of about $9,720 last year on dining in and out; on paper products and cleaning supplies; and on caring for their cats (they have two). This left them with $16,077.

The Mertens' next-highest expenditure in 1994 was $3,980 in property taxes and payments they made on a fixed-rate, thirty-year, thirty-two-thousand-dollar mortgage, on which they paid an interest rate of 8.75 per cent. This left them with $12,097.

In April of 1994, Kenny's 1979 Oldsmobile, with two hundred and seventy-nine thousand miles on it, was no longer worth repairing, so he bought a 1988 Grand Am from Bonita's brother Eugene for three thousand dollars, on which he made four payments of two hundred dollars a month. The Grand Am was damaged in an accident in September, whereupon he traded up to an eleven-thousand-dollar 1991 Chevy Blazer, and his car-loan payments increased to $285 a month. Bonita has reproached Kenny for what she regards as a nonessential purchase. "A man's got his ego," he replies. "The Blazer is also safer—it has four-wheel drive." The insurance on Kenny's cars cost a total of $798, and he spent five hundred dollars on replacement parts. Kenny figures that he spends about twenty dollars a week on gas, or about $1,040 for the year. After car expenses of $2,338 and after payments on the car loans of $1,655, the Mertens had $8,104 left to spend. A ten-day driving vacation in August of last year, highlighted by stops at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Mammoth Cave, in Kentucky, and the Hard Rock Cafe in Nashville, cost fifteen hundred dollars and left them with $6,604.

The Mertens' phone bill was approximately twenty-five dollars a month: the only long-distance calls Bonita made were to her mother and to her youngest brother, Todd, a thirty-three-year-old aerospace engineer living in Seattle. She kept the calls short. "Most of our calls are incoming, and most of them are for Christopher," Bonita says. The Mertens' water-and-sewage bill was about fifty dollars a month; their gas-and-electric bill was about a hundred and fifty dollars a month. "I have a hard time paying them bills now that the gas and electric companies have consolidated," Kenny says. "Before, if the gas was seventy-five dollars and the electric was seventy-five dollars, I could afford to pay one when I got paid. My take-home pay is too low to pay the two together." After paying approximately twenty-seven hundred dollars for utilities, including late charges, the Mertens had a disposable income of $3,904.

Much of that went toward making payments to a finance company on two of Kenny's loans. To help pay for the family's 1994 vacation, Kenny borrowed eleven hundred dollars, incurring payments of about seventy-five dollars a month for two years and three months, at an interest rate of roughly twenty-five per cent. Kenny was more reluctant to discuss the second loan, saying only that it consisted of previous loans he'd "consolidated" at a rate of about twenty-five per cent, and that it cost him a hundred and seventy-five dollars a month in payments. Also in 1994 he borrowed "a small sum" for "Christmas and odds and ends" from the credit union at Bonnie's Barricades; twenty-five dollars a week was deducted from his paycheck for that loan. Payments on the three loans—about forty-three hundred dollars last year—left the Merten family with a budget deficit even before their numerous other expenses were taken into account.

Except in a few small instances (according to their 1994 Iowa income-tax return, Bonita and Kenny paid H & R Block a hundred and two dollars to prepare their 1993 return, and they gave a hundred and twenty-five dollars to charity), it isn't possible to determine precisely what the rest of the Mertens' expenditures were in 1994. Several years ago, Kenny bounced a lot of checks, and he has not had a checking account since. Kenny exceeded the limits on both of their MasterCards a few years ago, and the cards were cancelled. Bonita has a J. C. Penney charge card but says, "I seldom dust it off." Now and then, Bonita went to a downtown outlet store, and if a dress caught her fancy she might put it on layaway. On special occasions, she bought inexpensive outfits for herself and for Kenny. Before last year's summer holiday, she spent seven dollars on a top and a pair of shorts, and during the trip Kenny bought a seventy-five dollar denim jacket for himself and about fifty dollars' worth of T-shirts for the whole family at the Hard Rock Cafe. One consequence of Kenny's having had polio as a child is that his left foot is a size 5 ½ and his right foot a size 7. If he wants a comfortable pair of shoes, he has to buy two pairs or order a pair consisting of a 5 ½ and a 7. Often he compromises, buying sneakers in size 6 ½. David wears T-shirts and jeans as long as they are black, the color worn by Garth Brooks, his favorite country singer. Christopher is partial to name brands, and Bonita couldn't say no to a pair of eighty-nine-dollar Nikes he coveted last year. The Mertens spent about seven hundred dollars last year on clothing, and tried to economize on dry cleaning. "I dry-clean our winter coats and one or two dresses, but I avoid buying anything with a 'Dry-clean only' label," Bonita says.

The Mertens' entertainment expenses usually come to a thousand dollars a year, but that amount was exceeded in 1994 when Kenny bought a mountain bike for every member of the family. The bikes (Bonita has yet to ride hers out of the driveway) cost two hundred and fifty-nine dollars apiece, and Kenny made the final payments on them earlier this year. This July, David rode Kenny's bike to a hardware store, and it was stolen while he was inside. Kenny yelled at David; Bonita told Kenny he was being too hard on him, and Kenny calmed down.

Bonita and Kenny don't buy books or magazines, and they don't subscribe to newspapers. (They routinely borrowed Eunice and Tony's Des Moines *Register* until Tony's death, when Eunice cancelled it.) They rarely go to the movies—"Too expensive," Kenny says—but regularly rent movies and video games, usually at Blockbuster. For amusement, they often go to malls, just to browse, but when they get a serious urge to buy they go to antique stores. Kenny believes in "collectibles." His most treasured possession is an assortment of Currier & Ives dishes and glasses.

The Mertens have never paid to send a fax, or to send a package via Federal Express, and they aren't on-line: they have no computer. They even avoid spending money on postage: Kenny pays his bills in person. Bonita used to send out a lot of Christmas cards, but, she says, "I didn't get a whole lot back, so I quit that, too." They spend little on gifts, except to members of Bonita's family.

Kenny knows how much Bonita loves red roses. Twenty-two years ago, he gave her one red rose after they had been married one month, two after they had been

## COLONIAL COPLEY

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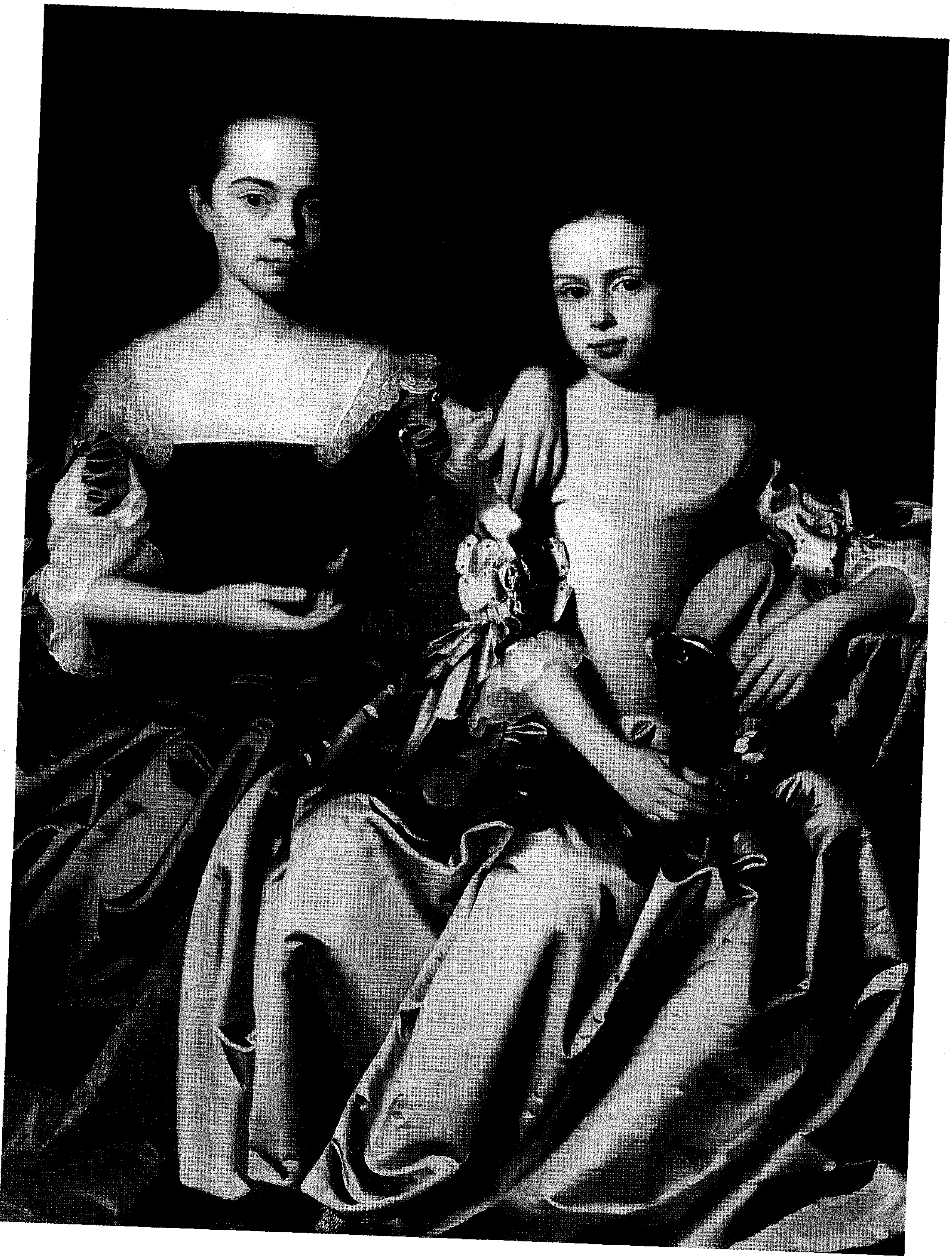

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married two months, and continued until he reached twelve red roses on their first anniversary. He also gave her a dozen red roses when she had a miscarriage, in 1973, "to make her feel better." To celebrate the birth of David and of Christopher, he gave her a dozen red roses and one yellow one for each boy. And Kenny gives Bonita a glass rose every Christmas.

ON a Sunday evening this summer, the four Mertens went to Dahl's, their supermarket of choice in Des Moines. They bought four rolls of toilet paper (69 cents); a toothbrush (99 cents); a box of Rice Krispies (on sale for $1.99); eight sixteen-ounce bottles of Pepsi ($1.67); a gallon of two-per-cent milk ($2.07); a large package of the least expensive dishwasher detergent ($2.19), the Mertens having acquired their first dishwasher in 1993, for a hundred and twenty-five dollars; two jars of Prego spaghetti sauce ($3); a box of Shake 'n Bake ($1.99); two rolls of film ($10.38), one for Kenny, who owns a Canon T50 he bought for a hundred and twenty-five dollars at a pawnshop, and one for Christopher to take to Boy Scout camp in Colorado; a battery ($2.99) for Christopher's flashlight, also for camp; a pound of carrots (65 cents); a green pepper (79 cents); some Ziploc bags ($1.89); a Stain Stick ($1.89); a box of 2000 Flushes ($2.89); a package of shredded mozzarella ($1.39) to add to some pizza the Mertens already had in the freezer; and twelve cans of cat food ($3). Bonita bought one treat for herself—a box of toaster pastries with raspberry filling ($2.05). Christopher asked for a Reese's peanut-butter cup (25 cents), a bottle of Crystal Light (75 cents), and a package of Pounce cat treats ($1.05). All three purchases were O.K.'d.

David, who is enchanted by electrical fixtures, was content to spend his time in the store browsing in the light-bulb section. He was born with a cataract in his left eye, and the Mertens were instructed to put drops in that eye and a patch over his "good" right eye for a few years, so that the left eye wouldn't become lazy. Sometimes when they put the drops in, they told David to look up at a light. Today, David's main obsession, which apparently dates back to the eyedrops, is light. "We'd go someplace with David, and if there was a light with a bulb out he'd say, 'Light out,' " Bonita recalls. "We'd tell him, 'Don't worry about that,' and pretty soon he was saying, 'Light out, don't worry about that.' "

At twenty, David looks fifteen. A lanky young man with copper-colored hair, hearing aids in both ears, and eyeglasses with thick lenses, he attends Ruby Van Meter, a special public high school for the city's mentally challenged. He reads at a fifth-grade level, and he doesn't read much. For years, the Mertens have been applying—without success—for Supplemental Security Income for David. In June of this year, when his application for S.S.I. was once again turned down, the Mertens hired a lawyer to appeal the decision. David has held a series of jobs set aside for slow learners (working, for instance, as a busboy in the Iowa statehouse cafeteria and in the laundry room of the local Marriott hotel), but he says that his "mood was off" when he was interviewed for several possible jobs this summer, and he drifted quietly through his school vacation. He will not be permitted to remain in school past the age of twenty-one. If David could receive monthly S.S.I. checks and Medicaid, the Mertens would worry less about what will happen to him after they are gone. They have never regarded David as a burden, and although he has always been in special-education classes, they have treated him as much as possible the way they treat Christopher. Say "special ed" to Bonita, and she will say, "Both my boys are very special."

The Dahl's bill came to $44.75. When Kenny failed to take money out of his pocket at the cash register, Bonita, looking upset, pulled out her checkbook. She had expected Kenny to pay for the groceries, and she had hoped that the bill would be forty dollars or less. But Kenny was short of money. "Aargh," Bonita said, softly.

Bonita didn't want to write checks for groceries, because she has other ideas about where her biweekly paychecks—about four hundred dollars take-home—should go. Most of her first check of the month goes toward the mortgage—$331.68 when she pays it before the seventeenth of the month, $344.26 when she doesn't. Bonita likes to put aside the second check for the two most important events in her year—the family's summer vacation and Christmas. In theory, Kenny is supposed to pay most of the other family expenses and to stick to a budget—a theory to which he sometimes has difficulty subscribing. "I don't like to work off a budget," he says. "I think it restricts you. My way is to see who we have to pay this week and go from there. I rob Peter to pay Paul and try to pay Peter back." In practice, Kenny rarely pays Peter back. With his take-home pay averaging about two hundred and thirty-five dollars a week, he can't.

When a consumer counsellor, who does not know the Mertens, was questioned about the family's current financial predicament—specifically, their 1994 income and expenditures—she made numerous recommendations. Among her suggestions for major savings was that the Mertens cut their food bills dramatically, to fifty-four hundred dollars a year. She proposed stretching the Mertens' food dollars by drastically curtailing their eating out and by buying in bulk from the supermarket. She said that Kenny should get rid of his high-interest loans, and use the money he was spending on usurious interest to convert his mortgage from thirty years to fifteen. The way Kenny and Bonita were going, the counsellor pointed out, they would not finish paying off their current mortgage until they were seventy-nine and seventy-seven years old, respectively. The Mertens' principal asset is eight thousand dollars in equity they have in their house. If the Mertens wanted to retire at sixty-five, they would need more than what they could expect to receive from Social Security.

The counsellor had many minor suggestions for economizing at the grocery store. The Mertens should buy powdered milk and mix it with one-per-cent milk instead of buying two-per-cent milk. They should cut down even further on buying meat; beans and lentils, the counsellor observed, are a nutritious and less costly form of protein. She recommended buying raisins rather than potato chips, which she characterized as "high-caloric, high-fat, and high-cost."

The counsellor had one word for the amount—between fifteen hundred and twenty-five hundred dollars—that the Mertens spent on vacations: "outlandish." Their vacations, she said, should cost a maximum of five hundred dollars a year. She recommended renting a cabin with another family at a nearby state park or a lake. She urged the Mertens to visit local museums and free festivals, and go on picnics, including "no-ant picnics"—on a blanket in their living room.

Kenny and Bonita were resistant to most of the suggestions that were passed on to them from the counsellor, who is funded mainly by creditors to dispense advice to those with bill-paying problems. According to Kenny, buying a dozen doughnuts at the supermarket and then taking breakfast to work would be "boring." Bonita says she tried powdered milk in the mid-eighties, when Kenny was unemployed, and the kids wouldn't drink it. She does buy raisins, but the boys don't really like them. Bonita and Kenny both laugh at the prospect of a no-ant picnic. "Sitting on the living-room carpet don't seem like a picnic to me," Bonita says.

Bonita surmises that the counsellor hasn't experienced much of blue-collar life and therefore underestimates the necessity for vacations and other forms of having fun. "We couldn't afford vacations in the eighties, and if we don't take them now the kids will be grown," she says. Kenny reacted angrily to the idea of the boys' eating dried beans and other processed foods. "I lived on powdered milk, dried beans, surplus yellow cheese, and that kind of stuff for two years when I was a kid," he says. "I want better for my boys."

Kenny acknowledges that he tried to confine his responses to the consumer counsellor's minor suggestions, because he realizes that her major recommendations are sound. He also realizes that he isn't in a position to act on them. He dreams of being free of debt. He has tried a number of times to get a fifteen-year mortgage, and has been turned down each time. "We both work hard, we're not on welfare, and we just can't seem to do anything that will make a real difference in our lives," he says. "So I save ten dollars a bowling season by not getting a locker at the alley to store my ball and shoes, and have to carry them back and forth. So I save twenty-five dollars by changing my own oil instead of going to Jiffy Lube. So what? Going out to dinner is as necessary to me as paying water bills."

Kenneth Deane Merten was born poor and illegitimate to Ruby Merten in her mother's home, outside Des

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Moines, on October 5, 1944; his maternal relatives declined to reveal his father's name, and he never met his father. Ruby Merten went on to marry a soldier and had another son, Robert. She divorced Bob's father, and later married Don Summers, a frequently unemployed laborer, with whom she had three more children. "Mr. Summers was so mean he made me stand up all night in the bed when I was eight years old," Kenny recalls. He has never hit his own sons, because "I know what it done to my life and I don't want it to get passed down." The family often moved in haste when the rent was due. Kenny attended eight or ten schools, some of them twice, before he completed sixth grade.

Kenny's mother died of cancer at twenty-seven, when he was fourteen. The three younger children stayed with Don Summers and a woman he married a month later. Kenny and Bob went to live with their maternal grandparents, and their lives became more stable. Even so, Kenny's school grades were low. "I had a hard time with math and science," he says. "Coulda been because of all the early moving around. I ain't stupid." He spent his high-school years at Des Moines Technical High School and graduated in 1964, when he was almost twenty.

Two days later, he found a job as a shipping clerk for *Look* magazine. He kept the job until 1969, and left only when it became apparent that the magazine was cutting back its operations. He drove a cab from 1969 to 1972, drank too much, and did what he calls "some rowdy rambling." He had put much of that behind him when he got a job as a factory worker at EMCO Industries, a manufacturer of muffler parts and machinery bolts, in the fall of 1972, shortly before he met Bonita.

Bonita Anne Crooks was born on October 7, 1946, in Harper, Iowa. Her father, Cloyce Crooks, was employed all his working life by the Natural Gas Pipeline Company; his wife, Pauline, stayed home to take care of Bonita and her three younger brothers. Bonita was required to do chores, for which she was paid, and to deposit those earnings in a bank. She took tap-dancing lessons, wore braces on her teeth, and often went with her family on vacation to places like California and Texas. "Kenny's growing up was a lot worse than mine," she says. In 1965, Bonita graduated from a Catholic high school and became a nurse's aide, while living at home and continuing to bank her money. In 1971, she moved to Des Moines, and the following year she got a job as a keypunch operator for a large insurance company. Keypunching, however, proved too difficult for her (she couldn't combine accuracy with high speed), and she soon transferred within the company to a lower-paying position—that of a file clerk.

Bonita met Kenny in October, 1972, on a blind date that had been arranged by a friend of hers. "I had been jilted by a younger man, and I knew Kenny was meant for me on our first date, when he told me he was born on October 5, 1944—exactly two years and two days earlier than me," Bonita says. She and Kenny fell in love quickly and were married in a traditional ceremony at a Catholic church in Harper on June 30, 1973. The newlyweds set off for Colorado on their honeymoon, but Kenny's car, a secondhand 1966 Pontiac Bonneville convertible, broke down, and the couple ended up in the Black Hills of South Dakota. When they were courting, Kenny had asked Bonita what sort of engagement ring she wanted. She had declined a "chunky" diamond, and said that matching wedding bands would suffice. "I suspected Kenny had debts," Bonita says. "I just didn't know how many he had until we got home."

The couple moved into a modest two-bedroom house. Bonita kept her file-clerk job after David's birth, in April, 1975, but when she became pregnant with Christopher, who was born in November, 1979, her doctor ordered her to bed. From the window of her bedroom, Bonita could see the Luther Park nursing home being built "kinda like next to my back yard." She didn't return to the insurance company, because her pay couldn't cover the cost of daytime care for two children. Kenny was working days at EMCO, so in June, 1980, Bonita took a job on the 3-to-11 P.M. shift at Luther Park. She earned more there than she had as a file clerk. On some nights, Kenny drove a cab. He needed two jobs, because he regularly spent more than he and Bonita earned, just as he had overspent his own pay when he was single. Every year or two, he bought a new car. "I shouldn't have bought those new cars, but life with Don Summers made me feel completely insecure," he says. "Driving new cars gave me a sense of self-worth."

Kenny lost his job at EMCO at the end of 1983. He says that he had asked his supervisor for permission to take some discarded aluminum parts, and that permission was granted. But as he was driving off EMCO's premises with the parts in the bed of his pickup he was accused of stealing them. His supervisor then denied having given Kenny permission to take the parts. A demoralized Kenny didn't seek a new job for a year. He had already stopped driving the cab—after being robbed twice—and had started mowing lawns part time in the spring and summer, and doing cleanup work and shovelling snow in the fall and winter. Kenny's business failed—"There were too many unemployed guys like me out there." Many of his prized be-

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longings were repossessed, among them a Curtis-Mathes stereo console. For two weeks in the summer of 1984, the Mertens were without gas or electricity or telephone service. They went on food stamps. Bonita felt guilty about going to work in air-conditioned surroundings while her husband and children were at home in the heat. Kenny felt humiliated when Bonita's parents visited their dark, sweltering house over the Fourth of July weekend. While Kenny has done better financially than most of his side of the family, it pains him that he hasn't done as well as Bonita's brothers, and that they regard him as a spendthrift and an inadequate provider. "When they get down on Kenny, I feel like I'm caught between a rock and a crevice," Bonita says.

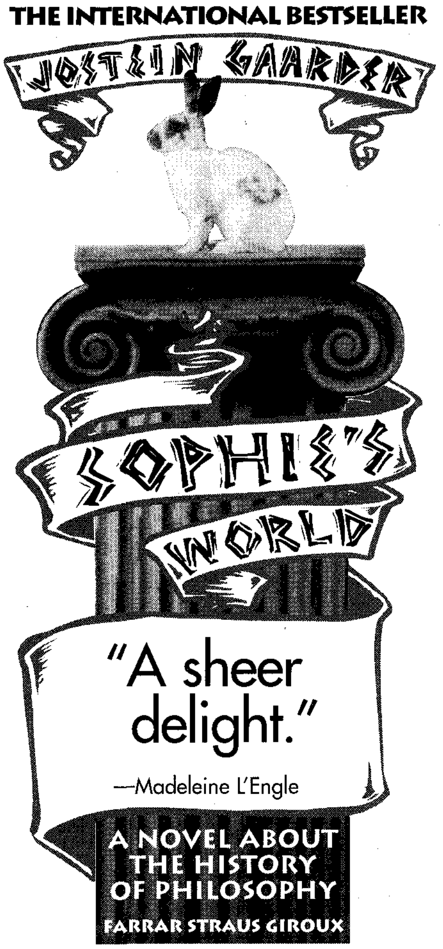
Kenny's starting salary at EMCO had been seven dollars an hour. By the time he was terminated, it was eight-ninety-five an hour. In 1985, he found several jobs he liked, but none paid more than seven dollars an hour. One such job was with Bob Allen Sportswear, and he kept it until 1987, when he was let go during the off-season. He occasionally filed unemployment claims, and the family qualified for food stamps and received some groceries from food banks. During the rocky period between 1984 and 1988, Kenny tried to continue making payments on bills that he owed, in order to avoid having to declare bankruptcy, but his debts grew to the point where they exceeded his assets by "I think twelve or thirteen thousand dollars"; his creditors—mostly finance companies—got fed up with him, and then he had no choice. The Mertens were able to keep their house and their '79 Olds. Going on food stamps didn't embarrass them—the boys had to eat, and they went off food stamps whenever Kenny had a new job—but the bankruptcy filing was published in the newspaper and made Bonita feel ashamed.

In 1989, after seeing an ad on television, Kenny enrolled in electronics courses at a local vocational school and borrowed seventy-two hundred dollars to pay for his studies. His deficiency in math came back to haunt him, and he eventually dropped out. While at school, he had heard of an opening as a janitor at Ryko Manufacturing, an Iowa manufacturer of car washes. He eventually moved up to a factory job, working full time at Ryko in the early nineties for three years. Those years were happy ones. He got regular raises, and during the April-to-December busy season he earned a lot of overtime. In the summer of 1991, the Mertens flew to Seattle to visit Bonita's brother Todd. They had just enough money to cover one plane fare, and asked Bonita's brother Eugene to lend them the money for the three other tickets. Bonita took three months off that year; by then, she had worked full time at Luther Park for eleven straight years and needed a break. Kenny was proud to be the family's main provider, and wanted Bonita to stay home and take it easy.

In February, 1993, Ryko fired Kenny Merten. His supervisors said that the work he did on the assembly line was neither fast enough nor of a sufficiently high quality. He was earning eleven dollars and eighty cents an hour—almost thirty thousand dollars a year including overtime—when he was terminated. "In today's job market, first-rate companies like Ryko can afford to be selective," he says. "They want to hire young men"

Around the same time, Luther Park announced that it intended to expand. The nursing home offered the Mertens thirty-nine thousand dollars for the house they had lived in for eighteen years. Kenny and Bonita accepted the offer, and were allowed to stay on, free of charge, for six months while they went house hunting. After they sold their house, it became apparent that they had been using it to supplement their income. The house they had bought for fourteen thousand eight hundred dollars had appreciated handsomely in value, but they had kept remortgaging, and now they owed twenty-nine thousand dollars on it. As a result, they netted only ten thousand dollars from the sale. The purchase price of the Mertens' new home was forty thousand dollars. They spent two thousand dollars from the sale of the old house on improvements to their new home, and this reduced the amount of the down payment they were able to afford to eight thousand dollars.

Kenny attempted to return to work at several of the companies where he had previously been employed, but they weren't hiring. It took him five months to find his current job with Bonnie's Barricades—far more arduous work, at lower wages than he had been paid at EMCO more than twenty years earlier. "I know I'll never be able to earn eleven-eighty an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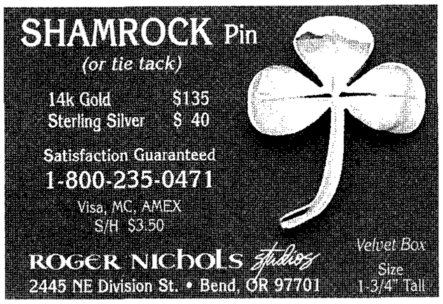
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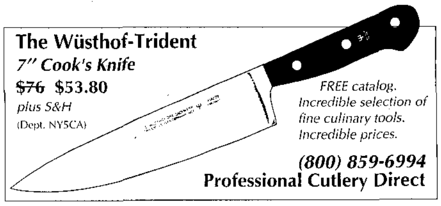
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hour again," he says. "The most I can hope for is a seven-dollar-an-hour job that doesn't involve swinging sandbags. Maybe if I come home less tired at the end of the day, I can handle an evening job."

THIS year did not get off to a good start for Kenny. In January, he hocked two rings that Bonita had given him for a hundred dollars, in order to pay a utility bill. Then, three months later, true to form, Kenny spotted two rings at a local pawnshop that he wanted Bonita to have—a hundred-and-ninety-nine-dollar opal ring and a three-hundred-and-ninety-nine-dollar diamond-cluster ring. He asked the pawnshop owner to take the two rings out of the showcase and agreed to make periodic twenty-dollar payments on them until they were paid off.

Kenny was not worried about how he would pay for the rings, or how he would pay for the family's annual summer vacation. In September of last year, a few days after the Mertens returned from that summer's driving trip, his Grand Am was rear-ended. After the collision, in which Kenny hurt his back, he hired a lawyer on a contingency basis. The young man who had caused the accident had adequate insurance, and Kenny expected to be reimbursed for medical bills and lost wages. (He hadn't been permitted to lift heavy objects for several weeks.) He also expected the insurance company to pay a sizable sum—ten or fifteen thousand dollars—for pain and suffering. Kenny's lawyer told him that he could expect the insurance company to settle with him by March. When the insurance money failed to arrive that month, Kenny's lawyer told him to expect an offer in April, then in May, and then in June. In early July, the lawyer said that he could get Kenny sixty-five hundred dollars by the end of the month—just in time to save the Mertens' summer vacation. The insurance payment and the annual vacation had been the focus of Bonita's attention for seven months. "If you don't go on vacation, a year has gone by with nothing to show for it," she says.

Bonita wanted the family to travel to Seattle to visit Todd because he had a new home and she was eager to see it. The Mertens made meticulous plans for a driving trip to the state of Washington. They decided they would get up at 4 A.M. on Saturday, August 5th, and drive to Rapid City, South Dakota. They would visit Mt. Rushmore, and Kenny, who has an eye for landscapes, would take photographs of the Devils Tower, in Wyoming, at sunrise and sunset. They would arrive at Todd's home on Wednesday, August 9th, spend a few days there, and return to Des Moines, by way of the Mall of America, in Bloomington, Minnesota, on August 19th. Both Bonita and Kenny had arranged with their employers to take one week off with pay and one without.

Six days before their departure, however, their lawyer called with crushing news: the insurance payment would not be arriving until September. The following evening, Bonita injured her shoulder lifting a patient at the nursing home, but she was still determined to have her vacation. Although Kenny was behind on almost all his bills—he had just borrowed seventy-five dollars from David to pay a water bill—he went to a bank and to his credit union on August 2nd to borrow twenty-five hundred dollars to cover the cost of the vacation, figuring he would pay off this newest loan from the insurance money in September. On the evening of August 2nd, Bonita reinjured her shoulder while helping another aide transfer a resident from her wheelchair to her bed.

Both the bank and the credit union turned Kenny down. Not only did he have too much outstanding debt of his own but he had also co-signed a loan on his half brother Bob's car. Without being able to borrow, the Mertens could not go on vacation. To make matters worse, Luther Park had sent Bonita to a doctor, and he informed her that she would require physical therapy three times a week for the next two weeks. The vacation would have to be cancelled. "When Kenny told me he'd been turned down for the loan, his jaw dropped about two inches," Bonita recalls. "Kenny was so shocked and disappointed for me that I couldn't be disappointed for myself."

The Mertens have had their share of disappointments, but they don't stay down long. On the morning they had set aside to pack for their trip, Bonita baked banana bread. That evening, after she finished work, Kenny took the whole family out to dinner. From there they drove to Blockbuster and bought two videos—"Sister Act 2" (David had loved the original) and a Beatles movie. They also rented two movies, and a video game that Christopher wanted. The boys spent the following week at their grandmother's. During the second vacation week, Bonita took David to the Iowa State Fair, in town. "Me and David really had fun together," she says.

Both Mertens spent a little money during the two weeks that they didn't go out West. Bonita made a payment to Fingerhut on a shelf that she had bought for David's room and on a game that she had bought him, and she finished paying Home Interiors for some mirrors, sconces, and a gold shelf that she had bought for her bedroom. "When I buy this stuff, I can see Kenny getting a little perturbed, but he doesn't say anything," she says. Later in August, the front brakes on Kenny's Blazer failed, and replacement parts cost about a hundred dollars. The labor would have cost him twice that much, but Eunice, the next-door neighbor, gave him some furniture that she no longer needed, and he bartered the furniture with a friend who is an auto mechanic. Kenny and Bonita agreed that driving with faulty brakes through the mountains on their way West would have been dangerous, so it was a blessing in disguise that they had been forced to remain at home.

On Friday, September 22nd, Kenny, feeling unusually fatigued, decided to take the day off from work. After lunch, he drove Bonita to their lawyer's office. The insurance company had agreed to pay Kenny seventy-two hundred dollars. The lawyer would get a third—twenty-four hundred dollars—and Kenny owed twelve hundred dollars in medical bills, so he would net thirty-six hundred dollars. He had wanted more—to pay off more of his debts and bills—but this was three days after Bonita's lucky potato strike, and she was feeling optimistic. She persuaded Kenny to put the agony of waiting behind them and to accept the offer.

The next day, Kenny drove Bonita, David, and Christopher to the pawnshop. The proprietor, Doug Schlegel, was expecting them. At the cash register, Doug handed Kenny a small manila envelope with the opal ring inside. "Hey, kiddo!" Kenny called out to Bonita as he removed the ring from the envelope. "Come here!"

Bonita tried to kiss Kenny, but he quickly moved away. "I love you," she said. After Bonita finished working the opal ring down the third finger of her left hand, checking to see whether it fitted properly, Doug told her, "You don't want to let it sit in the sun or put it in hot water."

"I know," Bonita said. "Opals are soft and touchy. They're my birthstone. I have one I bought for myself, but this is lots prettier."

Once the Mertens were back in the Blazer, Bonita asked Kenny, "Is the opal my birthday present?" Her forty-ninth birthday was coming up in two weeks.

"It's a pre-birthday present," Kenny replied. He didn't mention his plan to give her the more expensive ring—the one with the diamond cluster—for Christmas, provided he could make the payments in time.

"Thank you, Kenny. I love you," Bonita said.

"Sure," Kenny said. "You love to pick on me and drive me crazy."

Bonita touched Kenny's hand. "Leave me alone, I'm driving," he told her.

When Kenny stopped at a red light, Bonita said, "You're not driving now." But the light suddenly turned green.

THROUGHOUT the fall, Kenny Merten refused to fret over the very real possibility that he would have to file for bankruptcy again if he didn't get his financial house in order. He was thinking only as far ahead as Christmas—imagining himself putting the box that held the diamond-cluster ring for Bonita under the tree in their living room and marking it "Open this one last." Kenny predicts that when his brothers-in-law see the ring they will surely disapprove, but he doesn't care. "The rings shouldn't be in the budget, but they are," he says.

Kenny's mother's short life left him with a determination to marry once and to make that marriage succeed—something that few of his relatives have done. Bonita has often said that one reason she loves Kenny is that he surprises her every once in a while.

"Diamonds are a girl's best friend, next to her husband," Kenny says. "And Bonita's worth that ring, every bit of it. After all, she puts up with me." ♦

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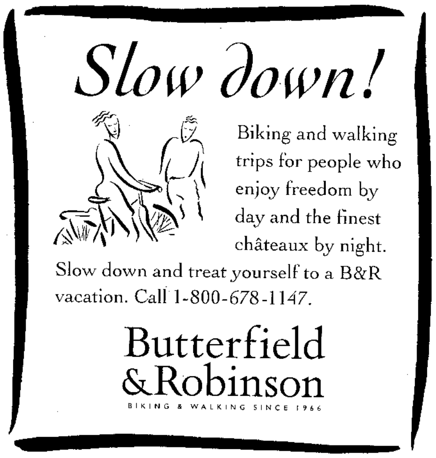

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## BOOKS

# REALLY FELLINI

*The director's memoir of Rome, fantasy, and film.*

BY ANDREA LEE

A FEW years ago, when I was visiting Cinecittà, the government-owned film-studio complex outside Rome, where so many legendary films were made in the grand old postwar days of cheap spaghetti and tame unions, I happened to pass by a soundstage where Federico Fellini was shooting. I didn't enter, but still came away with an impression of marvels: a tiny three-wheeled truck full of pink spangles parked outside; an elephant waiting casually beside a wall; people just this side of freakishness scurrying back and forth under green umbrella pines, as if they were setting up a circus designed by Hieronymus Bosch. As a memory, the scene seems strangely unreal in its details; I sometimes wonder whether I didn't imagine it all. Certainly, the director himself would have pardoned the presumption: no one has more exuberantly discounted, in life or in art, the importance of what the world calls hard facts. His agreeable memoir, "I, Fellini" (Random House; $26.50), is full of observations to this end. The text consists mainly of skillfully assembled excerpts from an ongoing conversation the director had with his friend the American journalist and biographer Charlotte Chandler, during trattoria meals, taxi rides, and late-night walks in his beloved Rome, for more than a decade before his death, in 1993. Most of it is in Fellini's own voice—amusing and unpretentious, if touched at times with the strenuously folksy tone that has become obligatory in this kind of literature. Near the beginning, he remarks, "I don't mind speaking autobiographically because I reveal less of myself talking about my real life than I do if I talk about the layer underneath, the one of my fantasies, dreams and imagination."

Indeed, as the book emphasizes, Fellini's "real life" had a curiously circumscribed, almost deliberately small-scale air. The great geographical movement of his existence was from his native city of Rimini to Rome, a journey of less than two hundred miles; he made it at the age of eighteen. After that, Fellini essentially stayed put, and he never severed ties with his background. The life of the man whose name, for many, was synonymous with libertine extravagance rested on a framework of petit-bourgeois ideals and tastes: good food; a secure home; a robust Catholic marriage, which, despite colossal stresses, lasted fifty years.

Born in 1920, Fellini grew up immersed in a kind of provincial existence which would not survive in Italy after the war—a world at once idyllic and suffocating, where town life still moved to rustic rhythms, and the Catholic Church and rigid social custom combined to regulate the lives of children and adults. Fellini's father was a travelling salesman of prosciutto and Parmesan cheese, who specialized in affairs with women he met on the road; his mother was a martyred wife, who wanted young Federico to become a priest. When he left home to seek his fortune as a cartoonist and journalist in Rome, he embarked on a course of work that was not without its raffish moments—for a time, he caricatured patrons in restaurants—but was remarkable chiefly for a kind of steady industriousness that would have gladdened the heart of any bourgeois mother-in-law. (Giulietta Masina, whom he married in 1943, was, apart from being a brilliant actress, an extremely proper middle-class young woman.) He moved from cartoon and dialogue work for the *fumetti* (comic strips) to writing for *Marc'Aurelio*, the most important humor magazine in the country, and composing comedy plays for radio—work that eventually brought him to screenwriting. Ever resourceful, he supplemented his income during the war by creating the Funny Face Shop, a successful establishment on Rome's Via Nazionale, where American soldiers came to have caricatures of themselves drawn. His entrance into filmmaking—first as a scriptwriter on Roberto Rossellini's "Open City," "Paisan," and "The Miracle," then as co-director, with Alberto Lattuada, of "Variety Lights," and, finally, in 1952, as the director of "The White Sheik"—showed a levelheaded handling of ambition and opportunity worthy of what Italians call *un ragazzo per bene*, a respectable young man.

Throughout his subsequent career, Fellini maintained a peculiarly modest sense of proportion in his existence. Unlike Luchino Visconti, with whom he was too often compared—Italian critics in the fifties divided themselves for a time into Visconti and Fellini cheering squads—he was never a part of international high society, never created a brilliant salon or lived on a princely scale. And, although his love affairs were notorious, they were never as public as those of Rossellini. He deceived his wife the way any upstanding Italian man does—by denying everything. Never rich, he lived in an apartment in Rome, a city that he hated to leave: he summered at nearby Fregene, shot his films at Cinecittà, and ate as often as possible at Cesarina, his favorite Roman restaurant. When Charlotte Chandler asked Tennessee Williams about Fellini, he paraphrased the Spanish expression "The world is a handkerchief" to comment, "Fellini's world is a *small* handkerchief." Fellini's own observation is "Life is the combination of magic and pasta." The pasta, clearly, was the ordinary but essential substance of daily life.

The magic was there from the beginning. "I, Fellini" gives a good portrayal of this "layer underneath"—the world of dream and imagination that expressed itself early in his art work and in his response to the limited instances of fantasy that entered the provincial world of his youth. One of them was sex, of course—associated, as it was for so many Italian men of his generation,

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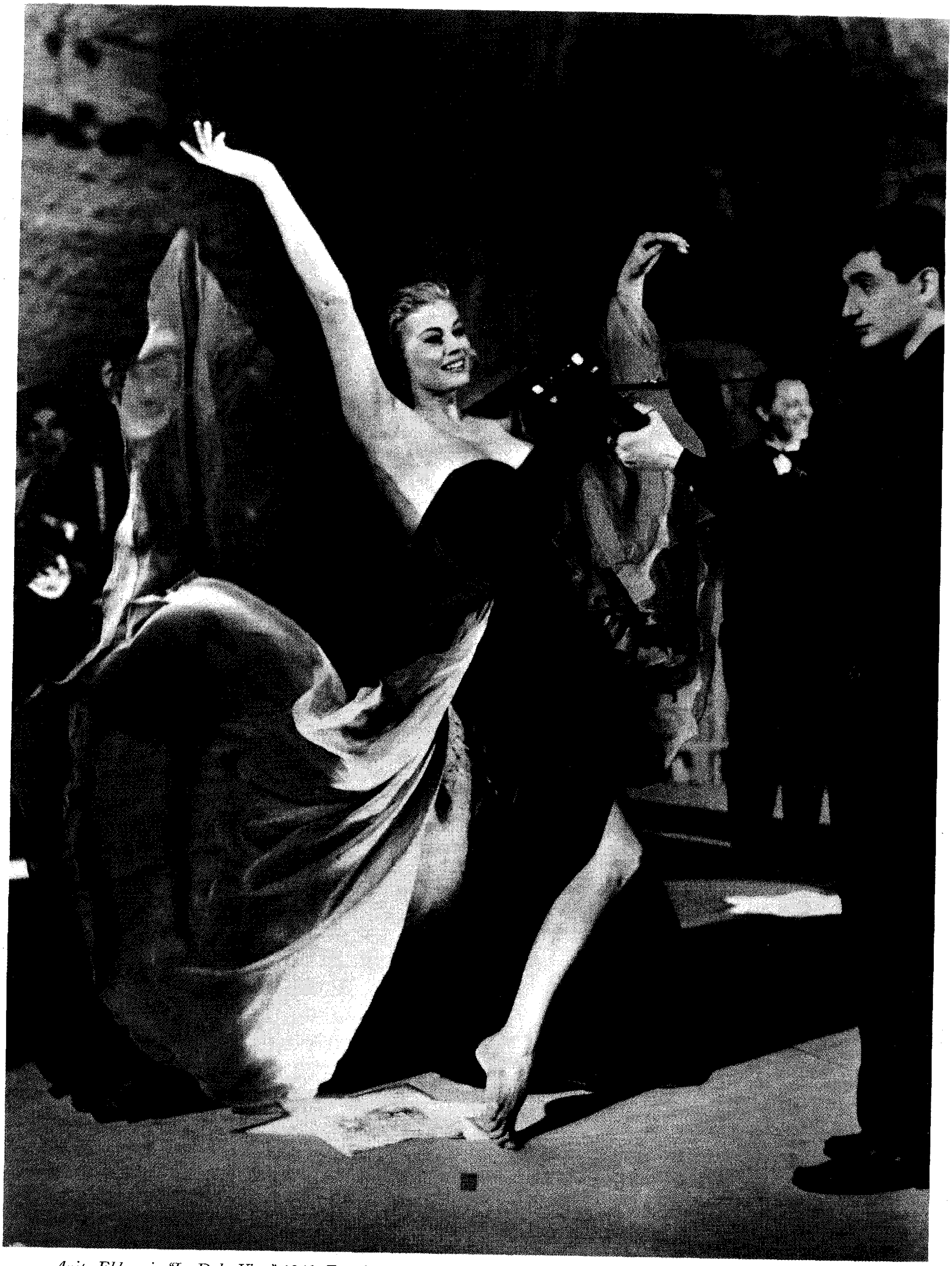

*Anita Ekberg in "La Dolce Vita," 1960. Few fantastic elements permeated the young Fellini's provincial world. Sex was one.*

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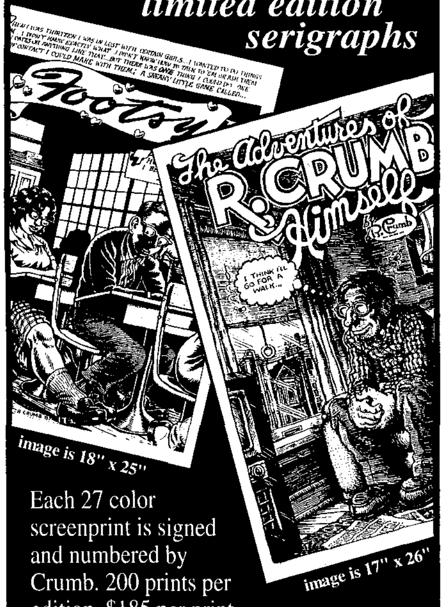
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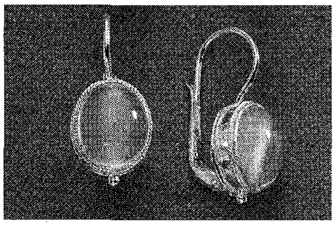

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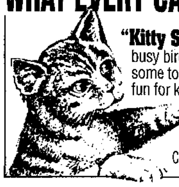

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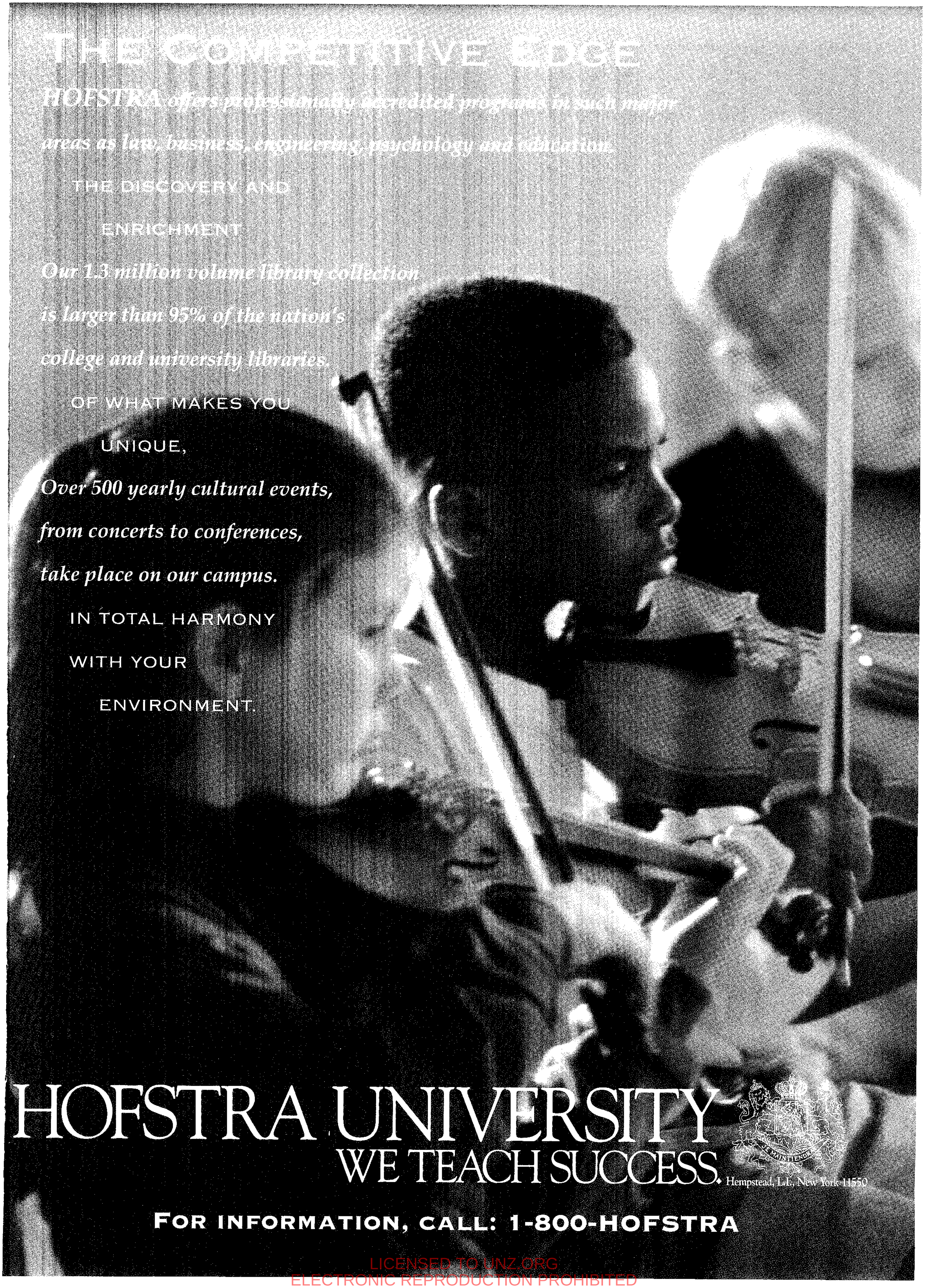
with earthy household scenes, with servant girls and prostitutes, and with foreign female tourists. Then, there were his own vivid dreams, themselves heartily stuffed with sex. There were exotic American comic strips, like "Little Nemo," and the *fumetti*. And there were various types of theatre (among which might be included the consummately theatrical Catholic Church): the cinema, where he worshipped Hollywood divinities; the *piccolo varietà*, travelling vaudeville shows featuring plump chorus girls and baggy-pants comedians; and, especially, the circus. On his first trip to the circus, as a boy in Rimini, he had a curious sense of coming home:

> The morning after I had been taken to the circus, I saw one of the clowns at the fountain in the square, dressed as he had been the night before. . . . I understood already that he and I were kinsmen under the skin, that he and I were one. I felt an instant affinity with his lack of respectability. There was something about his carefully planned shabbiness that went against my mother's definition of propriety. He couldn't go to school dressed like that, and he certainly couldn't go to church dressed like that. . . . Years later, I could look at that place by the fountain where he stood, and I could see an aura of a symbol of my whole life, as he stood there like a herald of my future. I was moved by what I perceived, by a feeling of ineffable optimism about him.

Although Fellini was well known for reshaping the anecdotes of his past, there is a ring of authenticity to that optimism. Indefinable but pervasive, it is a feeling present in the best of his films and in the beatific smile of Giulietta Masina, his muse, his ultimate clown. And it comes through strongly in his drawings. All too few of them are included in "I, Fellini." Nevertheless, one of the best things about the book is that it makes clear the primary importance of Fellini's art work in his creative production, and his own awareness of that importance. From early childhood, drawing was for him the most direct avenue to the world of fantasy that lay outside the canons of church and school and parental approval. A mediocre student, he passed his time at school covering pages with monsters and nude women; he courted his first love by drawing her portrait; and he once passed a final exam by presenting the members of the testing committee with a set of comic sculptures of themselves based on sketches he had made in class. His art work was his first link with the larger world: by his teens, he was selling cartoons and comic stories to magazines in Florence and Rome. As a director, he drew incessantly, designing characters in a savagely precise shorthand; he sketched cartoon portraits of friends, acquaintances, and strangers; he doodled hundreds of penises and mountainous female breasts and behinds in interesting constellations. And through much of his life he recorded his dreams in a sketchbook.

A glance at his drawings plunges the observer into a world of untrammelled energy, where the comic meets the totemic. They have the eerie power of children's drawings and cave paintings: Fellini's colossal ideal of female beauty has something both childish and paleolithic about it. They are the central step in the transformation of the raw material of imagination into film, and they are never without the humor that comes from exaggeration. In the drawings for "La Strada," Giulietta Masina is whittled down to a scarecrow waif, while in sketches for "La Dolce Vita" Anita Ekberg resembles a pair of dirigibles harnessed together below a tiny mask of a face.

Caricature is the most accessible of arts, and the fact that Fellini never left the Funny Face Shop far behind is surely one reason that his best films have had a more universal appeal than the earnest products of the neorealists, who sought above all to speak to the masses. While Visconti's masterpiece "La Terra Trema" left working-class audiences bored and perplexed, Fellini's "La Strada" inspired the formation of a fan club in Naples. The memoir gives a good idea of the curiously intimate veneration that Italians came to feel for Fellini. By his middle years, he had become a sort of monument in Rome. Cabdrivers called him by his nickname, Fefé, and he was able to stroll through rough neighborhoods at night without fear. Much of his appeal, of course, lay in the fact that the concerns behind his art were profoundly Italian: the contrast between the morality preached by the Catholic Church and the pleasures of the flesh, linked, if only imaginatively, to a pagan past; the profound nostalgia for a recently vanished traditional way of life; the obsessive desire for and fear of women, who



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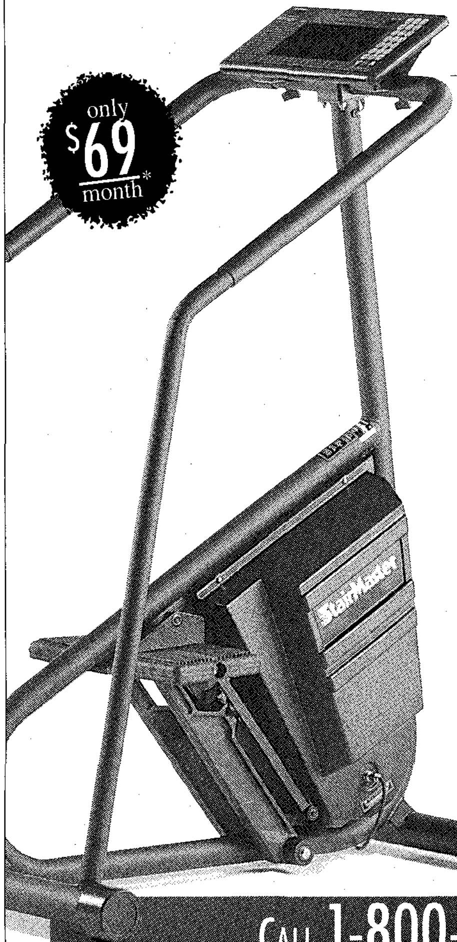

are characterized with precision as either whores or good wives; the search for individual honor in a world of compromise and equivocation. "I, Fellini" includes passages in which the director, attempting to rationalize his marital infidelities, sounds tediously like any small-time Italian playboy. These attitudes shaped his rich fantasies, and are part of the reason that to Italians his films come across as an exposition of the national subconscious.

FROM the beginning of his career, however, the rest of the world also loved Fellini. In his films, he permits chimeras to mix plausibly with the furnishings of daily life, and that is what we all hope for, no matter what country we live in. His 1953 short work "A Matrimonial Agency," a spoof of neorealism that was initially taken seriously by many critics, uses real-life details and a cinéma-vérité tone to describe a small, sordid marriage broker earnestly seeking a bride for a client who happens to be a werewolf. In this and other early Fellini films, fantasy makes abrupt intrusions into reality, as in "The White Sheik," when the sheik suddenly appears, swinging in full comic-book regalia high in the seaside pines. Fantastic material is woven into the homespun pattern of everyday small-town life, as in "La Strada" or "I Vitelloni," in which young men pursue mirages in the form of variety-theatre soubrettes or women masked in carnival costumes. "La Dolce Vita" depicts a delirium of high life, seen through the eyes of a young provincial and always balanced by glimpses of dreary quotidian scenes: a prostitute's suburban apartment, a roadside café, news from the hero's home town, a princess complaining about the price of eggs. In the later films, where, with varying degrees of effectiveness, Fellini abandoned reticence and allowed fantasy to dominate, it is reality that intrudes as a persistent counterpoint. It is present on the soundtracks: Fellini's characters speak not in homogenized movieland Italian but in the slang and authentic accents of regional dialects. And it is present, above all, in visual details: rolls of fat, sweaty faces, and a carnal grotesqueness that always brings us back to our own too solid flesh, and to laughter.

In the end, Fellini's monsters resemble the images of our dreams: they are based on distortions and amplifications of what is familiar. And, like dreams in general, they are not allegorical: they and the films that contain them have a dozen layers of allusion, which, as in all real works of art, finish in mystery. The failure of late films like "Ginger and Fred" and "Voices of the Moon" is due partly to a certain diffuse preachiness, a tendency to make a prosaic and limiting statement about the banality of contemporary life. Fellini's films at their best are as sublimely playful as his drawings, and never lower themselves to carry messages.

LIKE so many memoirs of famous artists, "I, Fellini" inevitably gives one the impression of scraps from a banquet—the banquet being the body of work, which is the real portrait of the man. Many of the scraps here are delectable. We love reading of Fellini's cautious experiment with LSD (he had himself checked by a cardiologist before indulging), inspired by his reading of Carlos Castaneda. It is great fun to take a look at Fellini's dreams, such as one in which a sea monster, a giant woman with "abnormally large" thighs, washes up onshore and lures him away from his mother. Then, there are the usual ironies and twists of destiny: the producers of "La Strada" suggested that Fellini look for a younger, more attractive actress than Giulietta Masina, and Tennessee Williams once put together a package of his writings for Fellini to work up into a film but forgot to mail it. We enjoy learning that Ingmar Bergman and Fellini once spent an evening walking around Rome, planning a film that they wanted to make together, and that Fellini adored Mae West. Mercifully, this unassuming collection of reminiscences attempts little analysis of personality or œuvre, and completely fulfills what the real purpose of such a book should be: to send us back to the movies.

Seeing the films again, we are reminded that entire essays have been devoted to their wonderful music. The scores of Nino Rota, especially, deepen the enchantment on the screen, min-

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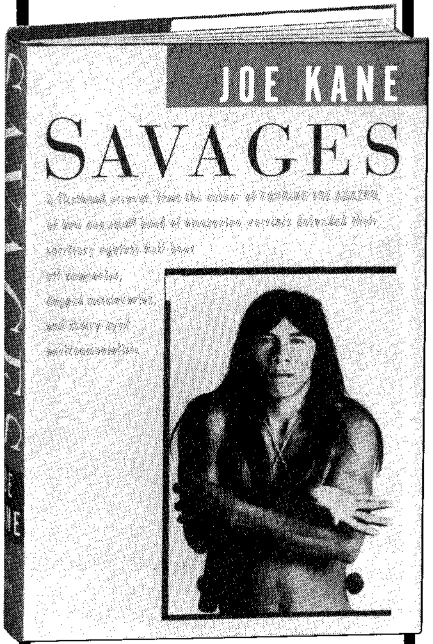

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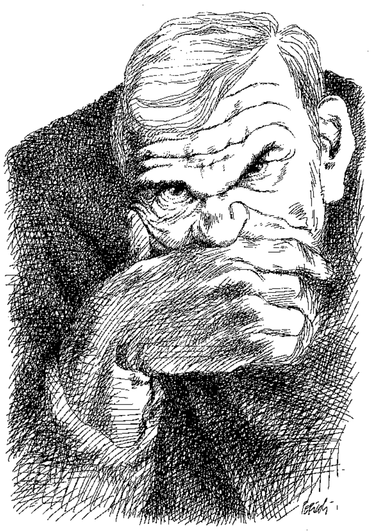
gling popular motifs, folk tunes, and the brassy innocence of circus music. However, in almost every production there is a moment in which the music falls silent and we hear the sound of the wind. It is usually a wind from the sea—the sea of Fellini's Rimini childhood, a rambunctious female element connected with desire and imagination. The wind itself is usually associated with unwelcome insights and bleak awakenings after revelry. "You're all nobodies," a young man mutters to his friends in "I Vitelloni." He is still in costume at dawn after a wild carnival party, stumbling drunkenly across an empty piazza as the wind whirls leftover confetti. At that moment, we feel the desolation of a life as it would be without illusion—a life all provincial scenes and pasta. It is as if the director had paused for an instant to allow us to imagine the dullness of a world without Fellini. But the wind in his films is also prophetic: for Fellini there is always another round of magic to come. This is the basis of his peculiar optimism—the optimism he borrowed years ago from a clown—and it is the chief, if childish, hope he extends to us, the lucky people who get to watch what he made from his dreams. ♦

# CZECHS AND BALANCES

*Kundera returns with a defense of art.*

BY STEPHEN SCHIFF



*Milan Kundera*

TULLIO PERICOLLI

THE Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia had the odd side effect of deglamorizing the greatest living Czech writer, Milan Kundera. Before 1989, he was also the most widely celebrated—the only contemporary Czech who enjoyed a sizable international audience. True, scattered readers knew who Josef Škvorecký and Václav Havel were, but no one was itching to make a Daniel Day-Lewis movie out of "Letters to Olga." And long before Kundera's "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" was an art-house hit it had become an enormous international literary event—the sort of serious novel that, like Gabriel García Márquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude" before it, was devoured by undergrads and intellectuals alike, by academics and beach readers and weary businessmen on planes.

Came the Revolution, however, and Kundera suddenly seemed less magnetic than the brave philosopher-kings running a newborn nation. He was nowhere near Prague when the Communists relinquished their power; in fact, he had been living in France since 1975. And during the first years after the revolution he returned only fleetingly, skulking in and out of his native land like a smuggler. The Czechs themselves no longer lionized him. In the eyes of many, he was a deserter who had got out when the getting was good—before the iron repressions of the late seventies and early eighties, before the jailings and the protests and the rise of the samizdat culture that eventually won the day. Worse, he had never used his international celebrity to further the anti-Communist cause. As his detractors saw it, Kundera had shrugged off the prospect of liberation as hopeless and therefore not worth fighting for. Then, in 1989, his old rival Havel became the head of state. The new President of Czechoslovakia was lauded around the world; he made speeches that were actually jewel-like political essays; his every pensée was published and perused. Kundera, meanwhile, kept a relatively low profile. He published a fine novel, "Immortality," in 1990,

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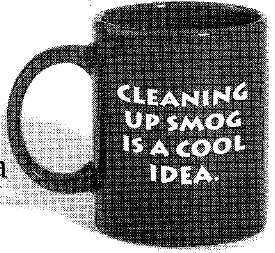

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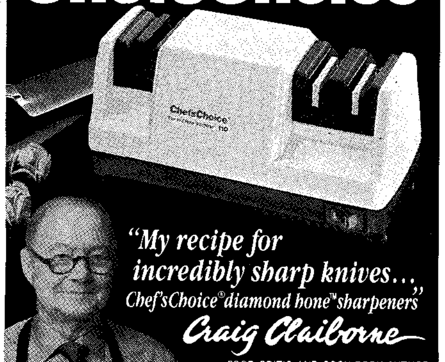
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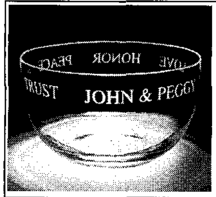

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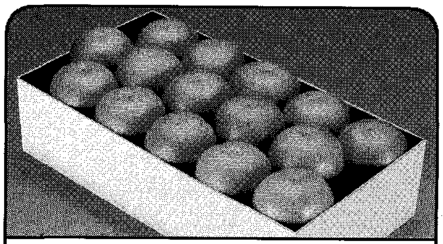
and then, for five years, no fiction at all.

Now he has produced a book-length essay, his second; its predecessor, "The Art of the Novel," was published in 1986. The new book, "Testaments Betrayed" (HarperCollins; $24), is beautifully written (and beautifully translated, from the French, by Linda Asher, an editor at this magazine). It is limpid and musical and erudite, and, much of the time, very nearly as entertaining as its author's novels, which themselves spring nimbly back and forth between narrative and expository forms. Still, I'm afraid the book is destined to have a very small audience. Its subtitle, for instance, is "An Essay in Nine Parts"—not much lightness of being there. And its subject is nothing so fashionable as the reëmergence of Middle Europe or the role of the artist in a repressive society. "Testaments Betrayed" is, of all things, a work of aesthetics. And it arrives at a moment when aesthetics itself seems a quaint relic of a bygone age.

"Art for art's sake" was the battle cry of the last fin de siècle. "Who needs art at all?" could be the battle cry of this one. Americans, at least, seem to have lost all comprehension of the uses of art: in the universities, it is widely viewed as the pallid reflection of the power structures that have produced it; in the mouths of political candidates, it becomes a purveyor of evil and a corrupter of children; even in the eyes of some critics, every new work is a message-bearing unit, to be scrutinized for its politics and its morality and judged accordingly.

How refreshing, then, to read Kundera's provisional definition of a novel as "a *realm where moral judgment is suspended.*" (The italics are his.) "Suspending moral judgment is not the immorality of the novel," he writes. "It is its *morality*. The morality that stands against the ineradicable human habit of judging instantly, ceaselessly, and everyone; of judging before, and in the absence of, understanding. . . . Not that the novelist utterly denies that moral judgment is legitimate, but that he refuses it a place in the novel. If you like, you can accuse Panurge of cowardice, accuse Emma Bovary, accuse Rastignac—that's your business; the novelist has nothing to do with it."

In this, his first chapter, Kundera is laying out his great theme: the independence of art, not only from the encroachments of morality but also from politics, from history, from uncomprehending



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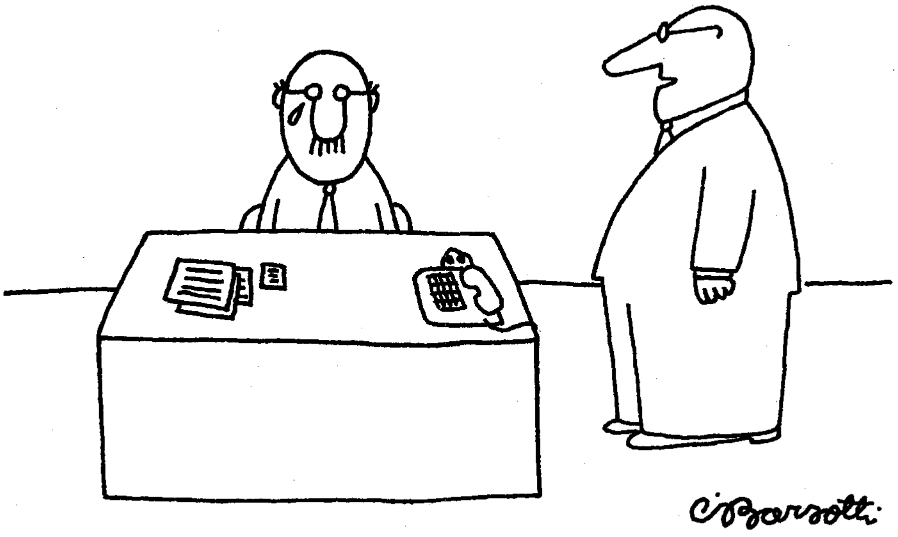
champions as well as uncomprehending critics—not to mention uncomprehending translators. For Kundera, art is a testament that must be taken at its word. Those who would interpret it, edit it, whitewash it, or embellish it are the betrayers of that testament, even when they believe that what they are doing is honoring the artist or helping him along. Hence Kafka's friend and champion Max Brod betrayed his hero's testament not only by publishing work that Kafka wished destroyed but by presenting the novelist to the world as an almost religious figure, a saint—thus, in Kundera's view, "castrating" Kafka and obscuring both his playfulness and his astringency. Hence Leonard Bernstein betrayed Stravinsky when he conducted "Le Sacre du Printemps" lovingly but with unnecessary rubato, distorting the composer's carefully calibrated rhythmic tensions. Hence an American biographer named Jeffrey Meyers betrayed Hemingway by interpreting his famous short story "Hills Like White Elephants" in the light of Hemingway's feelings toward his first wife, reducing the story's mysterious concreteness to the most banal sort of psychodrama. (Kundera is especially spiteful toward biographers, charging that they "know nothing about the intimate sex lives of their own wives, but they think they know all about Stendhal's or Faulkner's.")

This sort of thing can get a bit cranky, of course, and Kundera tends to spit and fume when he's airing his own thinly disguised grievances—for instance, against translators who pretty up an author's intentionally plodding prose, replacing dull repetitions with luscious synonyms of their own. Elsewhere, though, his touch is enviably graceful and light. Although he often appears to be improvising, casting his lines haphazardly in every direction, he is actually weaving a surprisingly sturdy web, and its design grows more entrancing with every chapter. Again and again, he circles back toward his favorites—not just Kafka and Stravinsky and Hemingway but Janáček, Musil, Rabelais, Nietzsche, Bach, Chopin, Tolstoy, Cervantes, Céline, Hermann Broch, Witold Gombrowicz, even Salman Rushdie—and as he connects circle to circle he constructs an aesthetic defense of modernism that is itself astonishingly beautiful.

He starts with a typically homely simile: the history of the European novel reflects, not quite chronologically, the history of European music, and both histories resemble a soccer game divisible into halves. "When it comes to music and the novel," Kundera writes, "we are all of us raised in the aesthetic of the second half." By "the second half" Kundera means the nineteenth century—the era of late-classical and Romantic music and of the realistic novel. But "the second half not only eclipsed the first, it *repressed* it," he writes. And that repression has had consequences for modernism as well, since modernism stands as the "third (or overtime) period" in Kundera's cultural soccer game—a period that harks back to the first period, and thus to the very aesthetic values that the second half has repressed. The "betrayers" whom Kundera scorns are those who cannot digest the works of the modernist "third period" because they can



*"Nonsense, Braddock, you do have a life."*

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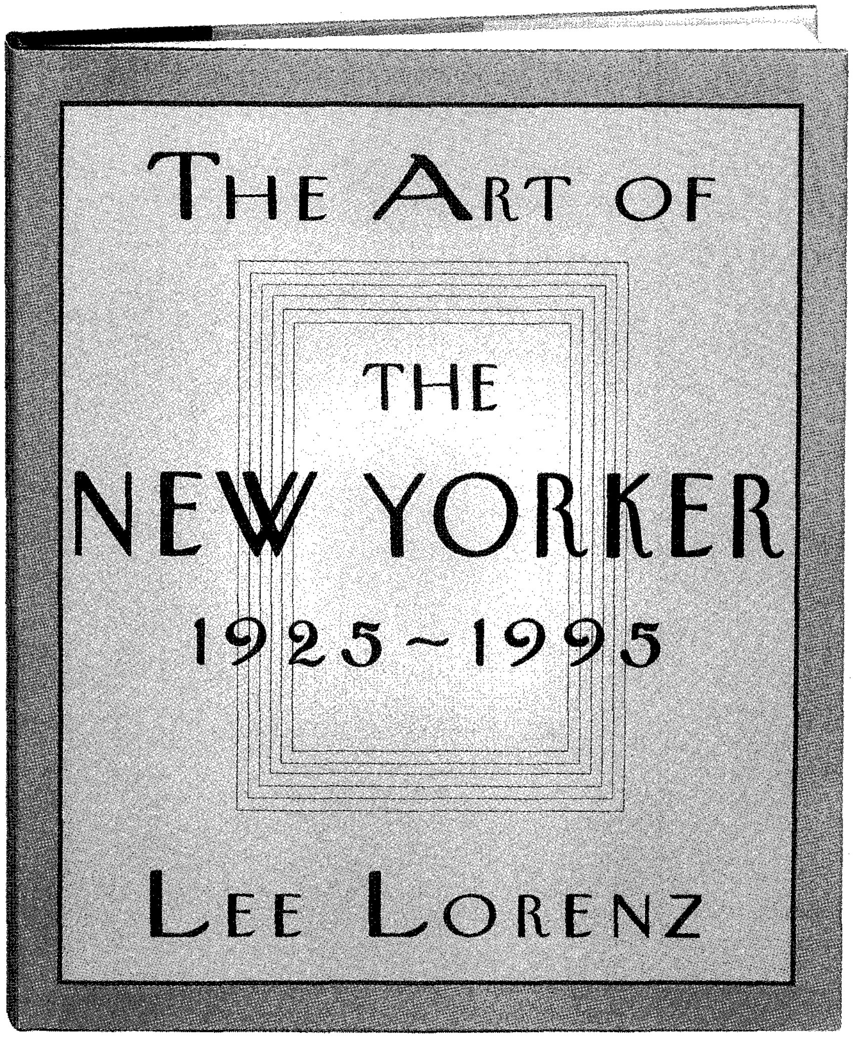

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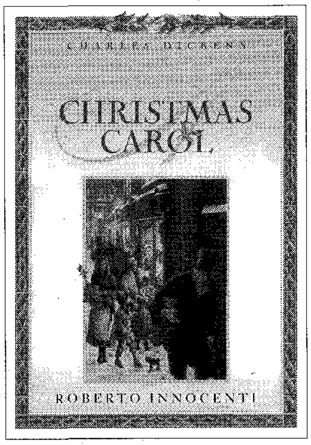

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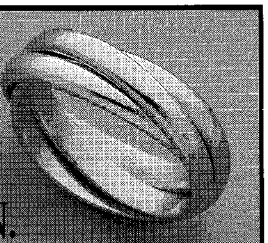

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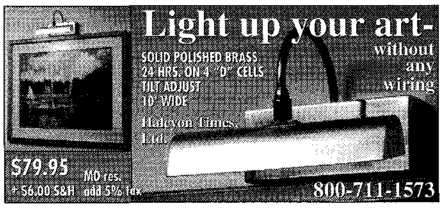

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view them only through the lens of the classical and Romantic "second period." They long for moral judgments from Kafka, even though Kafka repudiates them; they long for nice, neat bridges and links between melodic developments in Stravinsky and Janáček, even though Stravinsky and Janáček would rather throw bridges and links and in fact the whole notion of melodic development out the window; they long for systematic thinking from Nietzsche, even though Nietzsche abhors systems, because system-makers are always trying to *"fill in their system"* and in order to do so "they must try to present *their weak points in the same style as their strong points."*

As Kundera plumps for the values of the first half and their variations in the modernist "overtime," his own robust aesthetic emerges. What delights him about the early novelists is that "they talk about what fascinates them and they stop when the fascination stops": there's no filler in their novels, no boredom, no phony attempt to create the illusion of reality by amassing useless detail. Likewise, what delights him in modern painting is "that all the moments, all the particles of a work have equal aesthetic importance." What delights him in Janáček, Hemingway, Flaubert, Joyce, and even Nietzsche is the passion for the concrete, for dailiness, for the way conversations actually occur and thoughts actually arise—as opposed to the sort of deck-stacking theatricality and message-mongering that Kundera detests in Dostoyevski, Balzac, Hugo, and Orwell.

But to describe Kundera's enterprise so simply, as though it were merely a list of likes and dislikes, is to reduce it. One of this book's charms is the crablike motion by which Kundera builds and buttresses his tastes, gathering bits and pieces from far-off corners and bringing them back to the central edifice, which grows stouter as the book progresses. By the time he reaches his penultimate chapter, entitled "Paths in the Fog," Kundera is ready to leap from his aesthetic fortress back into the hurly-burly of politics and morality.

The chapter begins as a brilliant analysis of Kafka's "Trial," but it expands as you read it into an indictment of what Kundera calls "the spirit of the trial," which pervades contemporary Western societies: the spirit that turns the greatest philosopher of our century, Martin Heidegger, into a mere Nazi (which, alas, he also was) and therefore unworthy of

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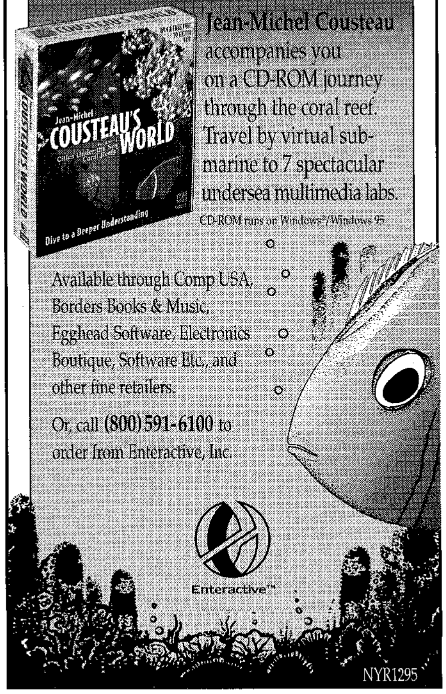

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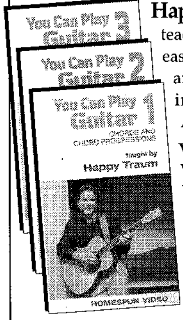

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our study and understanding; the spirit that turns Malaparte and Ezra Pound into mere Fascists, that turns Mayakovsky, Gorky, Brecht, and Sartre into mere Communists, and that even places some artists—such as Gide, Shostakovich, Breton, and Malraux—"on double trial, first accused of betraying the revolution, then accused for services they had rendered it earlier." A passage on that brilliant reprobate Céline is especially stirring: "As the abyss of time widens between judges and defendants, it is always a lesser experience that is judging a greater. The immature sit in judgment on Céline's erring ways without realizing that because of these erring ways, Céline's novels contain existential knowledge that, if they were to understand it, could make them more adult. Because therein lies the power of culture: it redeems horror by transforming it into existential wisdom. If the spirit of the trial succeeds in annihilating this century's culture, nothing will remain of us but a memory of its atrocities sung by a chorus of children."

And so it is that in defending "art for art's sake" Kundera achieves a profoundly compassionate moral and political philosophy. He agrees with Tolstoy that men are the tools of history, not the reverse. For Kundera, man proceeds through time as if in a fog—seemingly free, not entirely blind, yet unable to see more than a few yards ahead. But when man "looks back to judge people of the past, he sees no fog on their path," Kundera goes on. "From his present, which was their far away future, their path looks perfectly clear to him, good visibility all the way. . . . He sees their mistakes but not the fog."

There are those who would accuse Kundera himself of wandering in the fog after he left Czechoslovakia, apparently certain that the tyranny there would not lift during his lifetime. And there are those, therefore, who will probably accuse "Testaments Betrayed" of being defensive and self-serving. Perhaps they are right, in a way: it is probably safe to say that this exquisite defense of the artist against intemperate judgment could not have been written by someone who did not himself feel intemperately judged. But no matter. Unlike some of his heroes, Kundera has never been a real scoundrel. And what goes for even the worst of them certainly goes for him: that as long as there are careful readers the beauty of his work will remain his best defense. ♦

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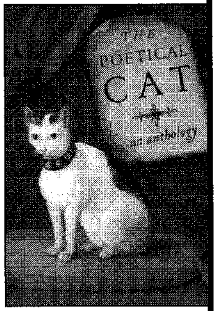

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# BOOKS BRIEFLY NOTED

### Fire in the Canes
by Glenville Lovell
(Soho; $22)

A beautiful woman, Peata, moves into a tiny West Indian village, arousing the jealousy of the other women. But Peata herself is jealous when the one man she wants prefers her daughter. As it happens, this suitor is a far from ordinary man, and his mission is to get the villagers to assume, for the first time since slavery ended, the dignity of free people. Lovell's mythic story is a treat to the ear, from the names of the local trees (shack-shack, flamboyant, mile) to the characters' lingering, musical speech.

### Simisola
by Ruth Rendell
(Crown; $23)

The wonderful thing about Rendell's august Inspector Wexford is how confused he is: as with most of us, when he makes an honest mistake his error points up, with bull's-eye accuracy, his most indictable assumptions. When inquiries take him into Kingsmarkham's tiny ethnic community, what starts off as a crash course in race and class relations turns—for all concerned—into a hall of mirrors. As usual, Rendell's clear, shapely prose casts the mesmerizing spell of the confessional.

### Force of Nature: The Life of Linus Pauling
by Thomas Hager
(Simon & Schuster; $35)

A thorough and thoroughly satisfying biography of a genius. Hager keeps track not only of Pauling's scientific contributions but also of the preoccupations of world science and the working conditions of American scientists during Pauling's long life (1901-94). His Nobel Prize in Chemistry, in 1954, elicited no dissent from the scientific community, and his Nobel Peace Prize, in 1962, reflected his dissent from this country's nuclear-arms policy. Hager emphasizes the intuitive, creative quality of Pauling's mind, which often put him ahead of his time, as in the case of his derided hunch, in 1956, that most mental disorders have a chemical basis.

### All God's Children
by Fox Butterfield
(Knopf; $27.50)

This is really two books in one. First, it is a history of the men in the Bosket family, a heartbreaking and terrifying chronicle of violence passed (genetically? culturally?) from one African-American generation to the next. But it also argues that behind this violence lies a struggle for respect inherited from the hypersensitive, almost paranoid code of honor followed by patrician white males in early-nineteenth-century South Carolina, where the Boskets were slaves. The force of the narrative is extraordinary, but it remains for the reader to sort out the ironies in the argument and to decipher the author's ambivalence toward Butch Bosket and his son Willie, two brilliant, fractured, and unbelievably dangerous men.

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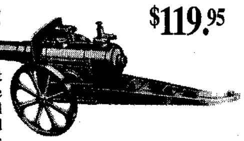

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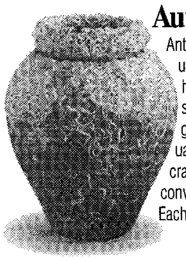

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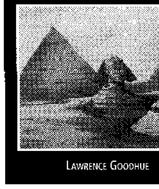

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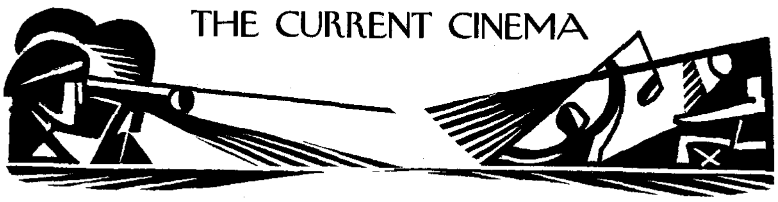
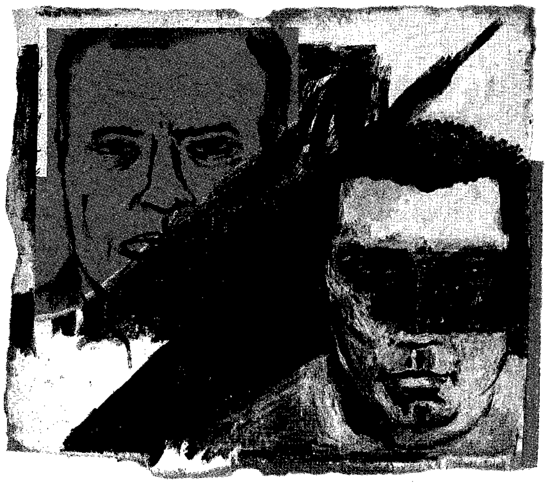


# TRADING PLACES

*Race relations in “White Man’s Burden” and family ties in “Georgia.”*

BY ANTHONY LANE

IN “White Man’s Burden,” John Travolta plays a man named Louis Pinnock who works in a chocolate factory. Pinnock is honest and industrious, but he looks a little squeezed and pinched, as if the air pressure around him had been pumped up. One day, as he leaves the factory, Pinnock is stopped by the black foreman and asked to deliver a package. He agrees. “Good man, Pinnock. I appreciate it,” the foreman says, and gives him a pat on the shoulder. There’s something about that gesture, at once trusting and patronizing, that sets off a whine of alarm in your head. What do we have here?



*Reverse discrimination: Harry Belafonte and John Travolta in “White Man’s Burden.”*

KAREN CALDICOTT

What we have is a conceit: the film stares at the colors of America and sees them, as it were, in negative. Wealth, comfort, and employment are the prerogative of a black élite; far below, sunk in stress and resentment, is an angry white underclass. It’s a simple idea, and you buy into it with surprising speed. The writer and director, Desmond Nakano, keeps the setup tight: he boils his imagined society down to a single bitter dispute between two characters, a concentrate of fear and loathing. In effect, he turns “White Man’s Burden” into a head-to-head bout, and what better image could there be for a country trying to beat itself up?

Pinnock’s troubles start with the package. He takes it to a swanky black suburb, finds the address, goes around the side of the building to make his delivery, and sees the lady of the house, Megan (Margaret Avery), wearing nothing but a towel. And that’s it: one glance, and Pinnock’s life is screwed. Megan’s husband, Thaddeus Thomas (Harry Belafonte), asks that a different delivery boy be used in the future; the next thing Pinnock knows, he is fired by his black boss. The movie now steps on the gas and, from here on, hurries its hero downhill. He can’t get another job, let alone a decent one (“Light-bulb tester,” the employment agency suggests); he starts to drag his wife (Kelly Lynch) below the poverty line; he has a truck that’s dying on him and a landlord who wants the rent yesterday; and, like every other stray white man, he has the cops on his tail. In the midst of a meaningless fracas, they crack him over the head; by the time he gets home, there are twin rivers of blood purling down the sides of his face. Another great day.

It’s lucky that Nakano snared John Travolta to play Pinnock. Many actors would have let the role dissolve into self-pity, but Travolta does the opposite: he hardens into a kind of rocky rage. Even if the movie weren’t about race relations, or the venomous lack of them, Travolta would still ring true: with his strut beginning to sag, with stiff sideburns, and with eyes that seem to lock into confrontation, he offers a ferocious portrait

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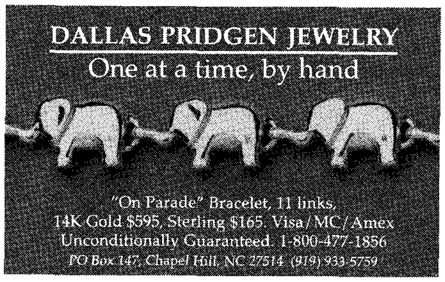
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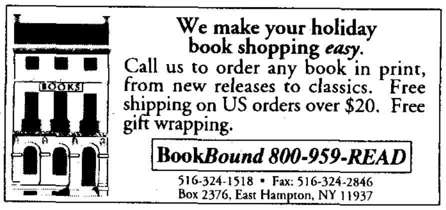
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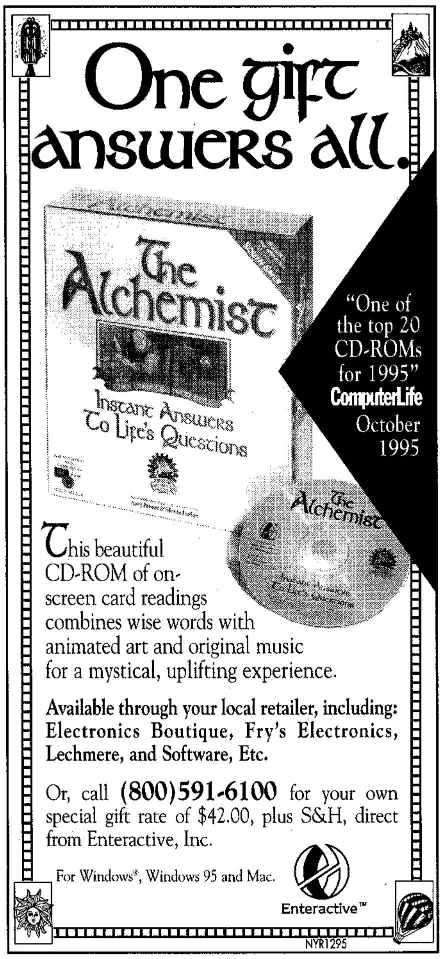

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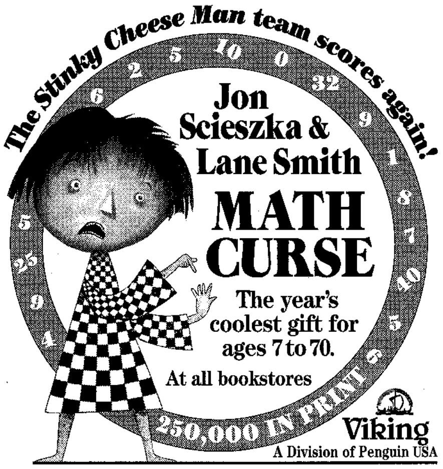

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of a workingman deprived of his work. He isn't asking us to like Pinnock: a scene with an innocent hamburger, which he attacks like a dog rooting through trash, takes care of that. Travolta just wants to stuff the character with life, to show that nobody—not even Pinnock—deserves to be treated like dead meat. And in the end there *is* something likable about Pinnock, with his comically short temper and his unparalleled ability to draw the short straw. I see him as a dumb distant cousin of Travolta's Tony in "Saturday Night Fever": if Tony had been told that he could never dance again, he might have become a Louis Pinnock and found somewhere else to aim his energy.

The target in "White Man's Burden" is Thaddeus, the rich man. (You get a whiff of Biblical parable here.) Pinnock goes back to the house, kidnaps the guy, and asks for money, by way of recompense for his lost job; the bank is closed, naturally, and so the two men are stuck with each other for the rest of the film. You may feel that you know where the story is headed: Thaddeus and Pinnock will sort out their differences and become brothers under the skin. But Nakano is using another map. He appears to be following the Hollywood rules of the forties—of a time when thrillers would set off down a dark alley and never come back. He has something cruel in mind for his characters: each man will indeed begin to grasp the nature of the other, and to edge in the direction of friendship, but that way sadness lies. After all that Pinnock has done, and with all that Thaddeus is, they can never be friends. "I don't think I can let you go, Thad," Pinnock says, and he repeats himself: "I don't know if I can let you go." The refrain is a beautiful way to nail down what both of these guys know: they are bound together for life, so one of them must die. Whether this counts as black comedy or white tragedy, I can't decide.

The best thing about "White Man's Burden" is that it runs for only ninety minutes. It comes at you hard, hits you with a few home truths, and makes a quick getaway. Nakano doesn't hang around and muse on the implications of his drama—a wise move, because they're not a pretty sight. He isn't denying that there is common ground between the races, and that people of good heart and good sense will always be prepared to cross it; the movie simply posts a warning that the common ground happens to be a minefield. Take the two contrasting episodes in which Pinnock shows Thaddeus how the other half eats. In one, Pinnock stirs salt and ketchup together to create the perfect dip for French fries. Thaddeus tries it, and agrees. In the other scene, an ordinary moment in a burger shack flames into a white-on-white shooting, where blood is thicker than ketchup.

The expression on Thaddeus's face as he watches that killing is one of total incomprehension: it is as if violence were another language and he had never learned a word of it. It's fun to have Belafonte's watchful, faintly austere sleekness back onscreen, and to hear that hoarse voice rubbing at the dialogue like the very finest grade of sandpaper. So smoothly does he ease into the role—Thaddeus wears his confidence as if it were cashmere—that I started to wonder whether Nakano's acute casting had confused the issues at hand, and whether "White Man's Burden" had as much to do with class as with race. Thaddeus's color doesn't really matter: a guy with a Rolls-Royce in his driveway—with *peacocks* on his lawn, for heaven's sake—is going to be spooked by intruders of every stripe. Pinnocks on the lawn will freak him out, period. Nakano has come up with a smart and unnerving piece of work, but he has rigged the evidence slightly in order to keep the plot on fire; the real challenge would be to keep the twist—black swaps with white—and then to make a movie about the middle classes, about the delicate racial negotiations that, instead of being hammered out, are peacefully brokered in undramatic homes.

All of which is not to downplay the gathering force of "White Man's Burden." What stays with you, though, as you look back on it, is not the racial impact of the central plot but the crowd of sneaky images that creep in at the sides: a black-superhero doll that Pinnock's son wants for his birthday, or programs that flash up on television when the weary father slumps down and surfs through the channels—black cowboys, an all-black soap, a black version of "Charlie's Angels." These details are designed to get a laugh, yet they carry a fair measure of the movie's moral weight, ADVERTISEMENT

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helping us to envisage the whole of American history turned inside out. You feel it in the movie's finest scene, which lasts less than a minute but suggests a lifetime of prejudice. Thaddeus's wife is taking her son and his new girlfriend out for the evening, and the son introduces his date: a white girl. On the mother's face there is the briefest streak of panic, and then a welcoming smile clicks into place. The burden lies not only on the white man: oppressors suffer silently, too, in their own way. If Nakano's movie is to be believed, the burdens have stuck fast to our backs, and they can never be shrugged off.

LIKE "White Man's Burden," Ulu Grosbard's "Georgia" is an interesting choice of movie to be released in time for the Christmas season. I certainly have no desire to be buried beneath an avalanche of snowy heartwarmers, but I don't quite see a niche for a movie whose idea of peace on earth is a short stay in a detox clinic. The Georgia in question is a singer, played by Mare Winningham. She performs to adoring crowds, and is calm incarnate; even her troubles feel composed, like the lightly pained harmonies of her folkish country rock. Her sister, Sadie, on the other hand, is top-heavy with drink, drugs, and a serious overdose of eyeshadow. She has hopes of following—or staggering—in the footsteps of her sister. "I'm Sadie Flood," she announces early on. "I sing." Only one of these statements is strictly true. When Georgia sings, out comes this pure melodic line that can surge without effort from crooning frailty to great lungfuls of resolve. When Sadie sings, she sounds like a flock of parakeets trying to rappel down a blackboard.

Readers will not be surprised to learn that Sadie is played by Jennifer Jason Leigh. I yield to no one in my admiration for this actress; I just wish that she would do a spot of yielding herself. There's no give in her performances anymore—not an ounce of fat. She seems to be out to prove something, to find the solution to an intractable problem, rather than to establish any lines of communication with the audience. Compare her recent work with an early movie like "Miami Blues": as the technique has grown more determined, so any sense of freedom—of unsupervised emotional play—has been locked away. In the case of "Georgia," she isn't helped by Grosbard, who, as he showed in "Straight Time" and "Falling in Love," has a habit of constructing long, flat, persnickety movies around brilliant actors. "Georgia" is almost plotless. The sisters fall out, fall back in. The rain falls, stops falling. Sadie is strung out on drugs, but we never see her taking any. A family eats dinner at night with the curtains still open, to show how dark it is outside. And conversations go like this: "What are you doing?" "Nothing. My favorite thing." Mine, too.

With very little alteration, the whole setup could have been a riot. The sisters could have bounced off each other instead of crying out their competing versions of "Hard Times." On occasion, Grosbard comes within an inch of humor and then flinches away. (To show a boozy, punkish Sadie fronting a band at a formal Jewish wedding and *not* get a laugh is quite an achievement.) His heroine's downhearted mood is infectious, and everyone within a mile of her gradually grinds to a dysfunctional halt. The exception is Max Perlich, who worked so well opposite Jennifer Jason Leigh in "Rush." In "Georgia," he plays Sadie's young husband, Axel, whose efforts to remain polite and affectionate are a lot more touching than the supercharged anguish that prevails elsewhere. "I was brought up to have the highest respect for women, very much so," Axel says. Then why did he pick Sadie?

One night, the two of them hitch a ride on a logging truck and take off into the dark—a sight that reminded me of Jack Nicholson, who hitched a ride on the same kind of truck at the end of "Five Easy Pieces." But Jack had the sour romantic courage to keep on going and not turn around, to quit his family for good, whereas the accursed Sadie eventually circles back to her sister and picks up where she left off. The pioneering urge to break loose and start over seems to be fading from the movies; these days, people prefer to stay and fight. The claustrophobia gets even thicker when you learn that "Georgia" was written by Barbara Turner, the mother of Jennifer Jason Leigh. As Sadie says to her sister, "You know what's so great about us, Georgia? We're so *close*." ♦

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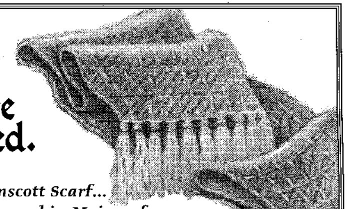

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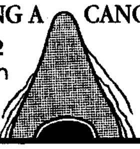

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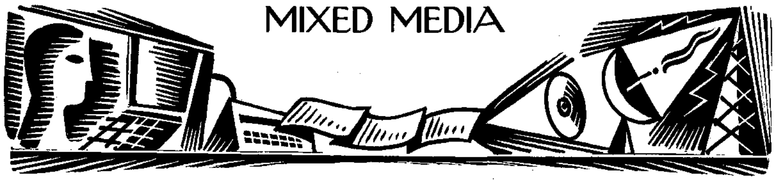


# MIXED MEDIA

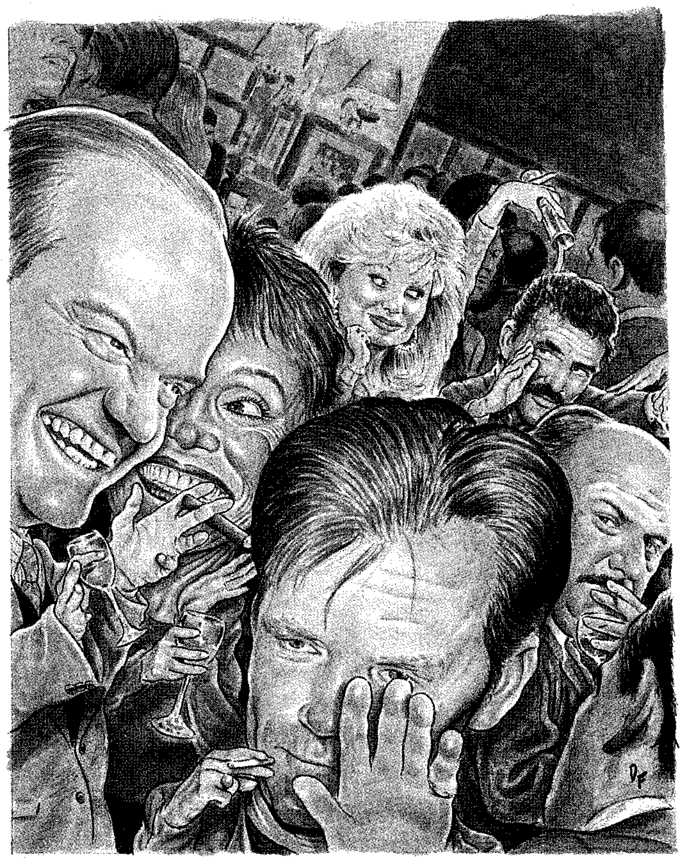
# THE VIDEO LIBRARY

*Small-screen stars are getting bigger at the bookstores.*

BY JAMES WOLCOTT

THE recent spate of TV books aimed at the best-seller list can be divvied into three categories: joke books by sitcom stars (Paul Reiser, Tim Allen, Ellen DeGeneres), most of them modelled on the minimalist dither of Steve Martin's "Cruel Shoes"; trivia-packed scrapbooks devoted to popular shows, such as "True Blue," a behind-the-scenes look at "NYPD Blue," which verifies rumors of David Caruso's prima-donna behavior (he once tried to jazz up a scene by kicking a wastebasket, missing his co-star Dennis Franz's head by inches); and the more traditional show-biz memoir, in which the celebrity author lets down his or her hair, or synthetic mop, as the case may be. A few of these memoirs assume a detached manner, like David Brinkley's and Charles Kuralt's (newsmen know how to intone), but most are confessionals, like Leonard Nimoy's "I Am Spock," the follow-up to his previous memoir, "I Am Not Spock." (Between books, he had a Vulcan mind-change.) The glossy jackets of these celebrity autobios resemble glorified *TV Guide* covers, suitable for framing, and the stars glow with unnatural health, like ears of genetically engineered corn.

Yet the whole point of these confessional texts is to tell us that everything wasn't picture-perfect in the authors' pasts. Each book takes us behind the gallant front to a hidden heartbreak, an abusive situation, or a medical condition kept hush. (Even Howard Stern, in his second book, stops spraying long enough to disclose his battle with obsessive-compulsive disorder.) The road to stardom is littered with casualties and regrets, and neon-lit with temptation. For some, the road to stardom can lead to the spiritual road to recovery. "The contemporary actor is now a metaphor for you and me, unlike the sequestered stars of yesteryear," Seymour Krim wrote in an essay called "The CAT Scan of Our Era: Actor as Incarnation." The actor's quest for self-realization is an amplified version of the average person's story. Or would be, if any of these phonies ever told the entire truth. Most of the books are too self-protective to be real inside peeps. They're packaged to be what was known in the Watergate era as "modified limited hangouts." And yet, even with ghostwriting and other safety filters, some truth manages to leak.



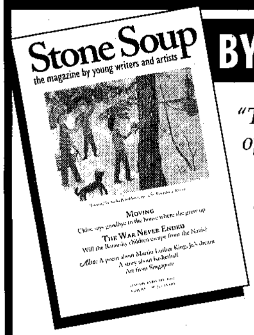
DREW FRIEDMAN

*Kelsey, Mary, Loni, Burt, Dennis (Franz), and David (Caruso): Confessionals and collectibles give us the stars on a first-name basis.*

Mary Tyler Moore leaves a much cooler temperature on the page than one might expect from America's next-door sweetheart. Her book, "After All" (Putnam), flits lightly through her career, from her leggy tease as the telephone operator in "Richard Diamond" to her Jackie Kennedy-of-the-suburbs phase as Laura Petrie in "The Dick Van Dyke Show"; from the ensemble triumph of "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" to her serious portrayal of the mother in "Ordinary People." Her flops are also recounted—the catastrophic staging of "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and her post-"Mary Tyler Moore" fizzles, among them the variety series whose cast included David Letterman, Michael Keaton, and Swoosie Kurtz. On the personal side, Moore reveals the slow-drip ennui of her marriage to the producer and programming executive Grant Tinker: it sounds as full of glacial pauses as an Ingmar Bergman psychological autopsy. "We cheered each other's ability to stride over life's potholes without looking down to see what repairs could be made," she laments. Driving becomes the metaphor for their marriage—it is a true L.A. story:

> Whenever Grant and I had separate cars . . . he always insisted on following me in case I encountered trouble of some sort. By the time we got home, but before the front door closed behind us, what had been intended as a caring, thoughtful act on his part turned into a matter-of-fact review of my driving skills: "You pulled into that lane without signaling on Ventura and Laurel"; "Didn't you see the broken pavement on Coldwater?"; "You anticipated the green light at Sunset and Bundy." The longer the trip, the more opportunity for mistakes and corrections. I dreaded those "tailing" trips. The minute I got into the car I self-consciously evaluated everything I did as though seen through his windshield.

Along with the dissolution of this marriage, "After All" has a high heartbreak factor—Moore's mother's drinking, her father's aloofness, her attempt to aid her brother's suicide, the premature death of her son, Richie, and the over-



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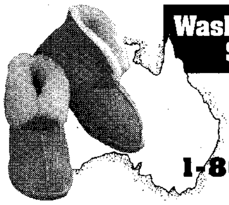

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dose of her sister, Elizabeth. Yet these incidents are rendered so matter-of-factly ("If I barely had the time for my son, I had even less for Elizabeth, and so we were more like aunt and favorite niece than sisters") that they have zero emotional weight. Occasionally, Moore strains to be coy: there are chapters on not having affairs with Elvis and Dick Cavett, who at one time she hoped would "put his arms around me and lead me to the best bed in the best house in the world and make inspired and inspiring love to me"—hokey smoke, Rocky! But otherwise the book seems rehearsed and recited, like a politician's memoirs. Even Moore's account of secretly drinking for years and finally entering the Betty Ford clinic has a movie-of-the-week bathos, as if she were playing herself on the page. Whenever she dramatizes herself, she stiffens. As Pauline Kael noted in her *New Yorker* review of "Ordinary People," Moore's performance as the Wasp mom was so emotionally pinched that she seemed "to be doing penance for having given audiences a good time" in her TV roles. This self-denial also afflicts Moore's performance in the new CBS series "New York News," where she plays the editor-in-chief, a classy battle-axe who has to make tough calls—Lou Grant in executive drag. Her characterization consists of arms crossed on an unyielding chest and eyes doing sentry duty from a bunker face. Moore is reported to be unhappy with her role. It shows.

LIKE Moore, Kelsey Grammer went from being a supporting player in a successful sitcom ("Cheers") to starring in his own series ("Frasier"). And, like Moore, he has admitted to having problems with substance abuse. But where she was a secret imbiber he has been a one-man Mardi Gras, photographed in the supermarket tabloids in full bleary-eyed bloat. His book, "So Far . . ." (Dutton), is even more withholding than hers. Where Frasier spouts pompous psychobabble, Grammer blows slimy soap bubbles. Here he is on "Cheers": "Those were wonderful times. The show was a hit, the work rewarding, and the money wasn't bad either. Of course it was fun, and we were like a family. But what family doesn't have its ups and downs?" Of his alleged affair with an underage girl, he says, "I met her at a time in my life when my opinion of myself was extremely low, and she gave me an extraordinary gift." He unveils his notion of the "heartwind," where man and God and nature are at one with the eternal rhythms. The love of a good woman is necessary to his inner breeze, too, and Grammer has been blessed in finding Tammi Alexander, who couldn't be more blond: "She is my friend, my confidante, my joy. And my fiancée. One day she will be my wife." Not so fast, big brow. According to the tabloids, Tammi has broken off their engagement in the months since those beautiful words were written, because of Kelsey's rock-around-the-clock partying.

Grammer denies this, but it points up a problem with celebrity confessionals today—their lag time. The tabloids, with their grainy zoom shots, unattributed quotes, and hysterical headlines ("LIZA MINNELLI WEIGHT SHOCKER"), storm the private domains of celebrities and scatter factoids willy-nilly. By the time the celebs attempt to tell their version of events (whether it be the truth or an alternative lie), the ground has been pretty well smoked. They either have to trot out new shockers or couch the old secrets in a narrative that places everything in a soothing perspective. Loni Anderson does both in her memoir, "My Life in High Heels" (Morrow), written with Larkin Warren. Anderson, whom the book-jacket copy describes as "a mother, a grandmother, and a beloved superstar," doles out anecdotes to which only she was privy, and addresses us from an angle of repose that allows her to look fondly at the follies of life in the fast lane. "There was a time I thought I'd lost everything," she writes. "Here's what I actually lost: bicoastal homes and household staffs; private jets; too many cars; a glamorous life; a public face; busy-ness; naïveté; fear." And what did she find? Guess. "I guess what I really found was myself."

Before Anderson became beloved, she was but another example of the species of pneumatic bombshell that S. J. Perelman described as a balloon smuggler. What made her semi-unique was that she played off the dumb-blonde image instead of into it. She first gained respectable notice as the smart, unflappable receptionist Jennifer on "WKRP in Cincinnati," where her ladylike body language expressed a message of high self-worth. This was a together woman who didn't want to get mussed. Her "WKRP" success led to groundbreaking work on other programs: "I did a three-hour combination 'Love Boat' and 'Fantasy Is-

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land'—I was the only person who ever came back from a 'Love Boat' cruise unhappy, so they had to ship me off to 'Fantasy Island' for repairs." But in the public mind her TV career was a mere preamble to her marriage to Burt Reynolds.

Twice married before, Loni had also known what it was like to be dazzled by famous dimples. While doing "Fiddler on the Roof," she had a one-night stand with John Gavin, our future Ambassador to Mexico: "It was straight out of a movie. He unlaced my boots, he took down my hair, he slowly undressed me, and he made glorious love to me." Anderson also had an ongoing affair with her "WKRP" co-star Gary Sandy, who was a regular Roto-Rooter Man. But Gavin and Sandy were little stars. Burt Reynolds was a big star. Indeed, he, like Loni, was a beloved superstar. When he walked into a room, the room said "Whoa." Inevitably, the account of their marriage is a fairy-tale romance, with Burt as Prince Charming, pulling out all the stops. He flies her to Florida for New Year's Eve and shows her his ranch. They dance naked on the balcony to the stylings of Frank Sinatra and Johnny Mathis. He buys her a Rolls-Royce. He renovates his Beverly Hills home for her, adding a pink marble bathroom where she can tinkle like a princess.

Yet the warning signs were obvious. It might have been an omen when he greeted her at the door during their courtship in a melted toupee. Surely there's cause for worry when a man counts Jim Nabors, Dom DeLuise, and Charles Nelson Reilly among his closest friends. (It's like hanging out with the bottom row of "Hollywood Squares.") And, although Loni recounts how badly Reynolds behaved toward her and her daughter during the making of "Stroker Ace," one of his good-ol'-boy vehicles, she doesn't seem to register how demeaning her role was. The coarse manner in which her character was used indicated a nasty streak that even Burt's dashing mustache couldn't disguise.

There's one funny episode in "My Life in High Heels" where Reynolds eats several hash brownies and spends the next thirty-six hours in a happy coma, brown juice trickling from his mouth. And when Reynolds isn't checking out on Halcion he's frazzled on painkillers and acting paranoid. He accuses Loni of sleeping with her pharmacist. Yet she married him, in 1988, long after the bugs in his software had surfaced. Of her wedding night

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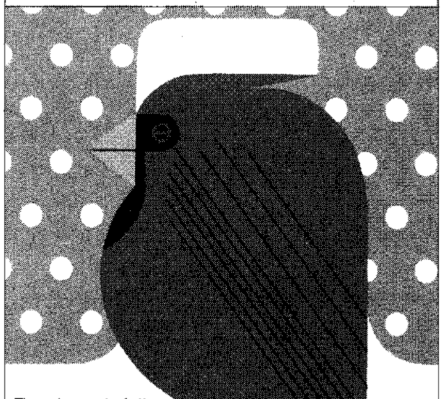

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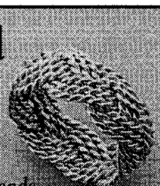

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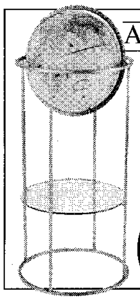

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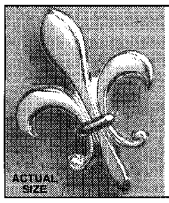

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she says, "I had every reason to believe that we would live happily ever after."

I caught Loni on "Oprah," where she was given a full hour to promote "High Heels," and Oprah dropped her jaw at each Burt outrage: his browbeating of Loni's daughter; his two-timing exploits; his snapping, when Loni wore lingerie to perk up their sex life, "What the hell do you think I am? A stud service?" Yet the people in the studio audience didn't seem genuinely aghast—they seemed to be humoring Oprah, who was overacting her incredulity. I suspect that many were tabloid readers, and so weren't surprised by this portrait of Reynolds they had seen him on the cover of the *National Enquirer*, hamming it up in the hot tub with his side squeeze Pamela Seals; they had read about him going bonkers on the set of his heartwarming family series "Evening Shade," where he threw a punch at the guest director John Ratzenberger and chucked a chair at the co-star Jay Ferguson. On "Oprah," Anderson looked too smartly assembled and accessorized—too much the royal lady of Rodeo Drive—to warrant pity as a woman wronged. And yet her life emerges as more involving in the telling than Mary Tyler Moore's. It has a surface believability and an amusing narcissistic purr. Even insincerity has its degrees of interest.

ALL these books sport happy endings: Mary Tyler Moore and her younger husband own a stable of horses; Kelsey Grammer has his heartwind; Loni Anderson has a handsome new beau. But the books all betray a hollow core, as if large segments of inner life had been sacrificed and neglected to keep the authors' billboard images freshly papered. In fact the books are more than advertisements for the stars whose faces adorn the covers. They're advertisements for stardom itself as an addictive sweet, an American entitlement. They're inspirational case studies, and too much introspection would spoil the illusion. Brett Butler, the star of the sitcom "Grace Under Fire," has gone on talk shows plugging her upcoming memoir, which she promises will be full of revelatory truths about her redneck past. She threatens to empty the cupboard in her desire to be real. Why bother? If we wanted honest-to-God literature, we'd go to—literature. They keep that in a different section of the superstore. ♦

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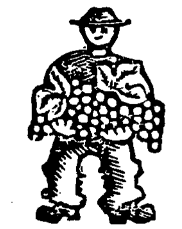

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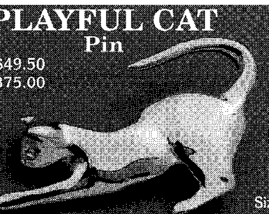

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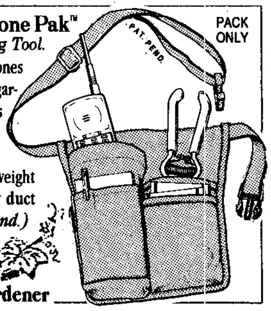

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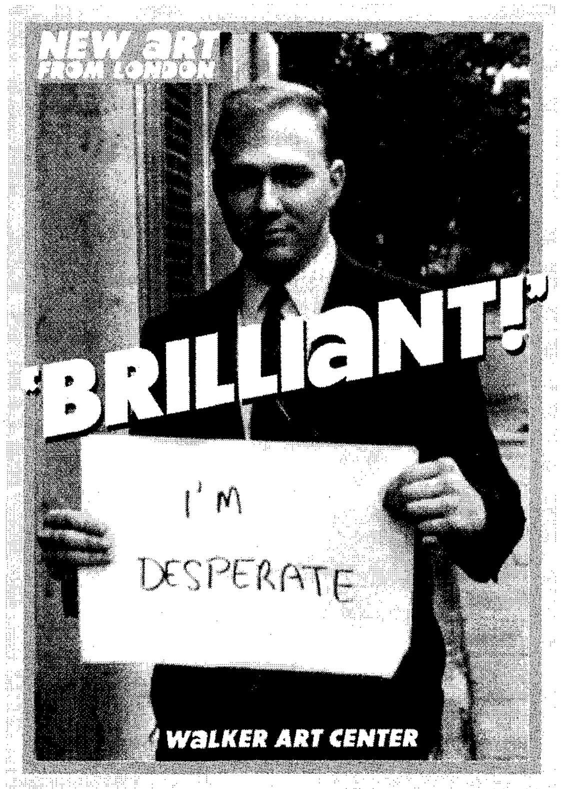
THE ART WORLD

# LONDON CALLING

*A British invasion of young artists at the Walker Art Center.*

BY CALVIN TOMKINS

"'BRILLIANT!' NEW ART FROM LONDON"—the title clues us in with a knowing wink. The promise of renewed life in the barely beating pulse of international contemporary art comes hedged with irony, "brilliant" being the current, meaningless London response to anything at all, as in: "See you at Fiona's." "Brilliant!" Apparently, we are to understand that this first American museum survey of work by the young British artists we have been hearing so much about lately (it's at the Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis, through January 7th), is no big deal. Just thirty years ago, Martin Friedman, then the museum's innovative director, put on a show at the Walker called "London: The New Scene," which helped to launch the careers of David Hockney, Howard Hodgkin, Bridget Riley, and several other young English artists. As just about any of the twenty-two artists in the current Walker show would be inclined to say, though—and as one of them, Tracey Emin, actually did say—"I couldn't give a fuck about this whole thing. It's just another show."



*Signs of the times: a flyer for "Brilliant!" incorporates a photograph by the artist Gillian Wearing.*

COURTESY WALKER ART CENTER

Well, maybe not. Nineteen of the artists represented (including Tracey Emin) came over from England to help install their work, and most of them agreed to be interviewed for the exhibition catalogue. That was to be expected, of course, because these youngsters are almost as well known for putting on exhibitions as for the work they exhibit. Ever since the famous 1988 group show called "Freeze," organized by Damien Hirst in an abandoned warehouse in the Docklands area of London, the youngest generation of British artists have dealt with a moribund art market by showing and promoting their own work in all sorts of ingenious ways—quite successfully, in some cases. (Hirst and Rachel Whiteread have become major art stars; in 1993, Whiteread won the coveted Turner Prize, which is awarded annually to a British artist under fifty, and last week it was announced that Hirst is this year's recipient.) Group solidarity still holds—at least, in the couldn't-care-less attitude that most of these young Brits picked up at Goldsmiths' College and other London art schools—but this may not be the case much longer. The show at the Walker Art Center is a watershed of sorts, and those who didn't get

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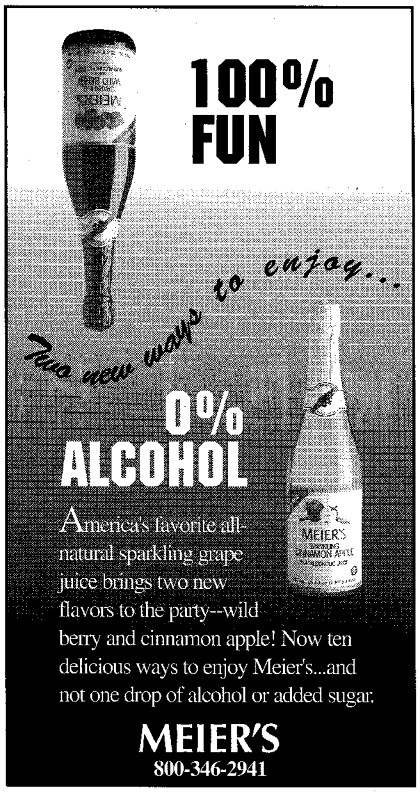

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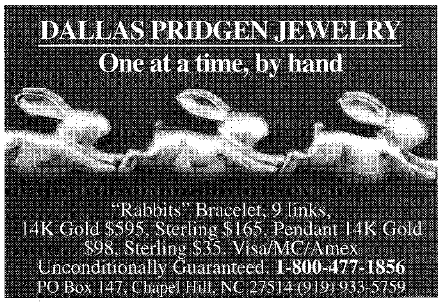

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invited—there are at least a dozen more who might have been—will probably have a tougher time keeping up.

Since the show mocks in advance any attempts at critical judgment ("Brilliant!"), I will keep this personal. On my first walk-through—I was just in from the airport—I experienced an unexpected lift. Some of the stuff is quite funny. A video piece by Gillian Wearing, which you encounter in the entrance area, before you get to the exhibition proper, shows the artist dancing energetically to music that only she can hear, in the middle of a vast London shopping mall, and the great thing is that people keep walking past her from both directions but not one of them pauses, or even sneaks a glance at her. It seemed like a lighthearted take on the irrelevance of art. Adam Chodzko's "The God Look-Alike Contest (Last Judgement Version)" struck me as equally British and only slightly less lighthearted. Chodzko had put an ad in a London paper requesting replies from people who thought they looked like God, and he framed and mounted twelve replies, including photographs of three obvious nerds, of one naked man on a bed, and of one young woman in a scarlet see-through teddy. He also received a brief written text, in English and Greek, which was signed "With my compliments, God." Rather cheering, too, I thought, was Angus Fairhurst's video of himself sewing together "A Cheap and Ill-Fitting Gorilla Suit" (that's the title), getting into it, and then jumping up and down vigorously until it falls off. I didn't much like Chris Ofili's overworked acrylic-and-collage paintings, whose collage elements were lacquered elephant dung, but it was harder to resist a small Ofili sculpture in a Plexiglas vitrine: also made of elephant dung, it sprouted black dreadlocks and was entitled "Shit Head."

Wearing, Chodzko, Fairhurst, and Ofili were new names to me, but in the democratic group context their work held its own against that of Damien Hirst and other biggies. But then Hirst was not showing any of the "natural history" pieces that have made him the last word in aesthetic outrageousness—a fourteen-foot dead tiger shark floating in a tank of formaldehyde, for example, or a proposed installation featuring two bulls and two cows, also dead, hooked up to a hydraulic device that would cause them to simulate bovine copulation. (The latter work was scheduled to be exhibited at the Gagosian gallery in New York this fall, but the gallery, anticipating problems with the New York City Department of Health, lost its nerve and cancelled the show.) Richard Flood, the Walker curator who organized the current exhibition, told me that the reason he and Hirst had agreed not to include any of the artist's dead-animal works was that the controversy they aroused would inevitably overshadow everything else in the show—a perfectly legitimate point. Hirst is represented in Minneapolis by three works: a large steel-and-glass enclosure containing an office desk and chair suspended upside down ("The Acquired Inability to Escape, Inverted"); an eight-foot-wide glass-fronted medicine cabinet whose shelves hold crushed and stubbed-out cigarette butts ("Dead Ends Died Out, Explained"); and one of the dot paintings he has been turning out since 1988, in which each regularly spaced, same-size dot is painted a different color ("Alphaprodine"). The trouble is, all three of these items reminded me of the work of other artists (Bruce Nauman and Bridget Riley in particular), and none of them packed anything like the wallop of the "natural history" works.

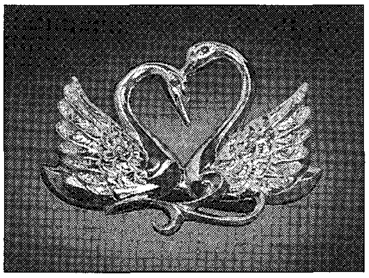
A similar decision was made in the case of Jake and Dinos Chapman. The Chapman brothers, who work together, were asked not to show any of the mutant mannequins they have been doing lately—children with penis noses and anus mouths, for example, which Richard Flood describes as "really quite confrontational and funny and stupid and smart all at the same time." Instead, the brothers contributed a life-size fibreglass sculpture, entitled "Ubermensch," of Stephen Hawking—the British theoretical physicist and author, who is afflicted with motor-neuron disease—sitting in his electric wheelchair, which is perched on a rocky precipice. The catalogue informs us that the work was inspired by Sir Edwin Landseer's "The Monarch of the Glen," but to me it seemed to be more directly influenced by the grim tableaux of Edward Kienholz, against which it almost certainly would not hold its own.

For the good of the group, then, its strongest and most disturbing talents agreed to take it easy. But does any group deserve such loyalty? That was the question that came to mind when I returned, later that afternoon, for a second viewing of the new art from London, which by then was starting to look to me more and more like the new art from SoHo, L.A., Milan, Berlin, and all the other stone-cold centers of contemporary neoconceptual deadendism. There was the usual wildly eclectic mixing of media: photo-based work; video loops; sculpture of the materials-never-before-used-to-make-sculpture brand (in addition to Ofili's elephant dung, there was a contribution, by Anya Gallaccio, of a looping chain of three hundred and sixty-five dead or dying gerbera daisies, called "Once Is Never Enough"); high-tech installations; appropriation art; and even a few paintings on canvas, both abstract and figurative. There was the same general no-style, the same disdain for anything that resembled skillful making, the same self-indulgent affectation of Warholian nastiness, domesticated through the blander influence of London's own Gilbert and George. It is nice to know that these young people promote one another's work and help to hang one another's shows, and that some of them live or sleep together (in ever-shifting combinations), but the kind of group synergy that can lead to great art—the synergy that once pulled first-rate pictures out of second-rate Abstract Expressionists—is nowhere in sight. (Just a personal opinion, mind you; I don't want to appear critical.)

What you do sense, perhaps, is a new twist to the underlying anger that these young people—many of them are still in their twenties—share with previous generations of British artists. Although much is made of their working-class origins and their disgust with Thatcherite and post-Thatcher Britain, they don't really seem to be all that pissed off. Instead of the corrosive bitterness of the sixties, which showed up so powerfully in the paintings of Francis Bacon and the plays of John Osborne, the current approach seems to locate humor in anomie. Stand for a while in the room where Sam Taylor-Wood has mounted a video installation that shows, on each of the four walls, a different friend of hers sitting at home and mutely lip-synching one of the voices in Richard Strauss's "Elektra" while the opera resounds at high volume from loudspeakers: the boredom of the non-singers, who play with their hair, smoke, yawn, and scratch themselves while the music scales its peaks and abysses of emotion, is enough to make opera itself a giggle—not permanently, I hope.

Gillian Wearing, the mall dancer, has two other pieces at the Walker, both of which made me laugh. One is called "Signs that say what you want them to say, not signs that say what someone else wants you to say," and it consists of photographs of people whom Wearing stopped on London street corners and encouraged to put down, on large sheets of paper, what they were thinking. My favorite is a shot of a young man in a too tight business suit, smiling only slightly as he holds up a sign that reads "I'm Desperate." For her final entry, Wearing somehow managed to videotape a dozen or so women from all walks of life, as they used to say, blowing into the tops of empty Coca-Cola bottles, and then orchestrated the results into an extremely funny thirty-minute tape called "I'd like to teach the world to sing."

There is something endearing about art that takes itself so unseriously. I ended up feeling good about the show again. I even took off my shoes to crawl into Tracey Emin's piece, which is off by itself in another part of the museum, because Ms. Emin, in spite of her previously cited comment about not giving a fuck, felt that it needed some privacy. The piece is a small blue-and-green tent on whose interior surfaces Ms. Emin has appliquéd the names of everyone she ever slept with, together with her written comments on how it went in certain cases. What I enjoyed even more, though, was the interview with Dinos and Jake Chapman that appeared in the catalogue. When Jake was asked why he thought they worked together as a team, he said, "Actually, Dinos had a great answer for it: he said, 'Because our own work is crap.' And then he said, which I liked even better, 'We're only good enough to make one person's work.' " A little further on in the interview, after Dinos expressed the opinion that Britain's "only export at the moment is hooliganism," Jake went on to say, "In the end, we understand that we're producing objects for the chattering classes. That's what we're involved in. That's the territory." Dinos chimed in with "We're trying to stop the chatter," but you could tell he wasn't serious. Although most of these artists come from working-class backgrounds, they haven't found a way to make art that would be of much interest to a working-class, non-art audience. Maybe Damien Hirst has: it's hard to imagine anyone not pausing to look at four defunct yet copulating cows. Of all the new art from London, his seems at the moment, and in spite of its obvious debt to Jeff Koons and one or two other American artists, to be the main challenge to the usual chatter. ◆



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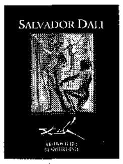

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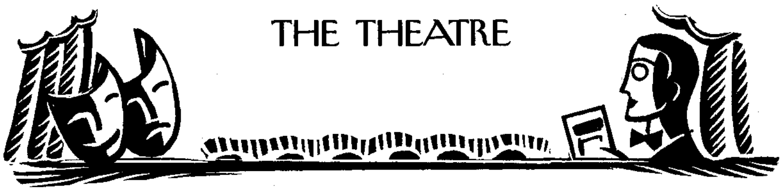
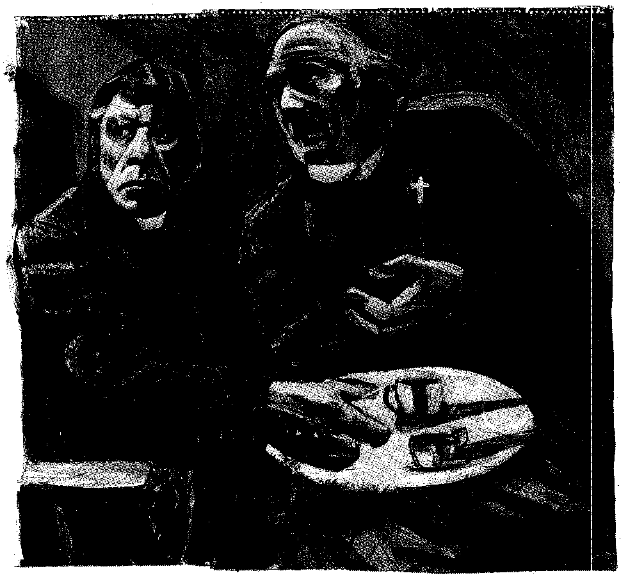


# ONE NATION, UNDER GOD

*David Hare surveys the state of Anglicanism in "Racing Demon."*

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

I HOPE I don't kill all interest in David Hare's "Racing Demon," an examination of one of the enduring, if frayed, threads of English national life—the Anglican Church—by saying that it's about what it means to live a good life and what it means to believe. The play is engaging, as opposed to merely interesting, because it starts from the premise that the two concepts are not necessarily related, and goes on to make you wonder whether they are even compatible. When the play was first performed, at London's Royal National Theatre, in 1990, it raised a lot of dust in the press, and it did so again three years later, when it was performed in a one-day marathon with "Murmuring Judges" and "The Absence of War," the two other plays in Hare's big-themed trilogy on the condition of England's institutions. Though the officially sanctioned religion of our country is capitalism, not Anglicanism, "Racing Demon" has something to say to Americans which hasn't been said lately by any American play, with the exception of "Angels in America." "Racing Demon" doesn't have the broad historical—or spiritual—reach of "Angels," and it doesn't smash theatrical categories, but it does make you itch in places that are hard to scratch. (Diane Shaffer's "Sacrilege," which closed a couple of weeks ago after a very brief run on Broadway, attempted to raise questions about the moral foundations of spiritual institutions by dealing with the issue of women becoming Catholic priests, but the only questions it raised successfully were: Why isn't this play any good, and when will it be over?)


*"That's the country we're living in": Brian Murray and Josef Sommer as embattled inner-city priests.*

ANDREA VENTURA

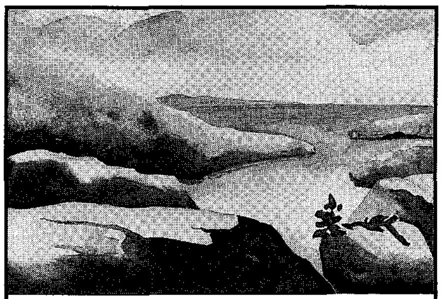
"Racing Demon," which is now at the Beaumont, under the direction of Richard Eyre (the artistic director of the National, and a longtime presenter of Hare's work), is set mostly in the parish of Lionel Espy (Josef Sommer), the leader of a team of four priests who operate what amounts to a social-service agency in a poor area of South London. But in a sense the play is set inside the Church of England itself, with the aim not of bringing down the mighty edifice from within—"Racing Demon" isn't radical or revolutionary—but of tapping its walls and pointing out areas of possible unsoundness, and of identifying the forces, both inside and outside the Church, that have contributed to its corrosion and to the corrosion of the body politic as well.

The first words of the play, spoken by Lionel as he prays in church, are

"God. Where are you?" (The stage is shaped like a cross, with different locations indicated by changes in lighting, and by projections. The feeling of being in church is created by a bracingly bright border of white light around the stage.) The question echoes in every scene and every encounter, whether it's when Lionel's bishop (played with growly, Old Testament authority by George N. Martin) is warning him about discontent in the parish and telling him that his duty is not to serve the poor but to "put on a show" for his congregation or when Harry (Brian Murray), another of the priests on the team, is about to be exposed as a homosexual by a tabloid newspaper and decides to flee the country rather than face his parishioners. (He tells Lionel, "They give knighthoods to people who publish this stuff. It isn't coincidence. That's the country we're living in.") The central drama of the play isn't the war between good and evil but the war between two kinds of good—expressed, on the one hand, in the laissez-faire attitude of Lionel, which is to listen to and learn from those he serves, and try to understand them, and, on the other hand, in the evangelical zeal of Tony (Michael Cumpsty), a young curate fresh out of seminary, who is the junior member of the parish team, and who believes that Christ "didn't come to do social work." Instead, "He came to preach repentance. And to offer everyone the chance of redemption." Lionel, in late middle age, has seen the Church become irrelevant, and, despite his spiritual depletion, he does what he can; Tony, full of the streamlined, locomotive energy of the undoubting, does what he feels he must, according to his faith, no matter how inhumane the consequences.

Hare's achievement is to take this conflict to its conclusion while remaining remarkably evenhanded all the way (though it isn't hard to guess where his sympathies lie). Grotesque as Tony sometimes is—at one point he says, almost proudly, that he has come to realize that his parents' death in a car accident was God's way of giving him a shock, that the accident was "directed at me"—he really does believe what he professes to believe, and his conviction makes you wonder whether Lionel's way of ministering, which is to comfort those in need of comfort, is a way of giving up, of surrendering to the status quo of hopelessness. There are times when Hare's evenhandedness seems schematic: he makes sure we don't think Lionel is *too* good by establishing that he's been a neglectful husband and father; and he shows us how worldly and privileged the bishop is by having him dine at the Savoy. But the production gives the play textures that keep it from being blandly decent. The projections, by Wendall K. Harrington, perfectly convey the dreary, rainy, midwinter-Sunday-afternoon-of-the-soul aspect of England. And the cast is terrific: Hare has written a play about important ideas, and the actors are able to bring these ideas to life. There is one character, however, who can't possibly come to life, though she's a not insignificant participant in the plot: Frances, Tony's unlikely girlfriend, and very soon his ex-girlfriend. She comes from a family with important Church connections, and, as played by Kathryn Meisle, she clearly has a modern, Emma Thompson-like head on her shoulders, but we never find out what she does for a living, or anything else of interest about her. The description of her in the stage directions reads, in its entirety, "Frances Parnell is thirty, blonde." Perhaps among men of a certain age and hair color—forty-eight, brown—saying that a woman is a blonde is saying all that needs to be said about her. I don't know. Anyway, excuse my little outburst—I'm a redhead (well, I am *now*), and I have a fiery temper.

Brian Murray and Paul Giamatti—he plays Streaky, the fourth member of the ministerial team—are delightful, particularly when they are working together on Lionel's behalf to keep him from losing his job. They're a familiar type of Anglican priest—rumpled, warm, long on humanity and short on theology, and, in the case of Streaky, truly eccentric and truly happy in his work. As Heather, Lionel's wife, Kathleen Chalfant is bleached out and withered, with a loneliness that seems to be the character's only real companion. Josef Sommer and Michael Cumpsty, the older vicar and the young curate, both inhabit their roles so thoroughly that you know that there will be no meeting of the minds between these men, and that that dynamism, though it's a dubious kind of dynamism, will win out over thoughtfulness and doubt. 'Twas ever thus. ♦



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# SHOUTS & MURMURS

## MY EX-HUSBAND AND THE FISH DINNER

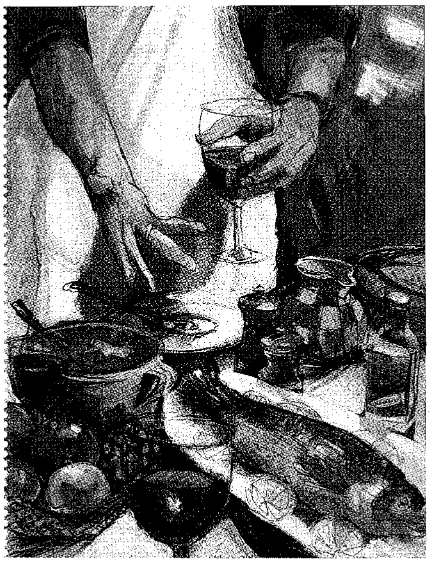
BY JOAN ACOCELLA

My ex-husband didn't care much for Christmas. What he loved was the night before Christmas. He was one of those Italian-Americans who in the wake of the civil-rights movement got deeply into their ethnic roots. So did others in his family, and consequently we spent a lot of time at what I recall as eighteen-hour cousins' parties, where they would all pass around Grandma's immigration papers and talk about the time Uncle Angelo got kicked by the mule. My son and I, when we had to go to these affairs, used to stow magazines in the glove compartment, and every few hours or so we would sneak out to the car for a little rest.

Around this time, too, my husband decided to Italianize our Christmas. The people in his grandparents' generation had followed the old-country custom of eating their feast not on December 25th, but the night before. And it wasn't turkey; it was a nine-course fish dinner. (December 24th was a fast day—no meat. Nine courses of fish was their way of fasting.) My in-laws, by way of assimilating, had switched over to turkey. This now seemed to my husband a hideous betrayal. We were going back to the old way, he declared. So the next December 24th, and every December 24th after that, we had a dinner that could kill an army.

Many of his recipes came out of Marcella Hazan's excellent cookbooks, but he had his problems with Marcella Hazan. Number one, she was a Northern Italian, which in his mind, as in the minds of most of the descendants of the largely Southern Italian people who immigrated to this country at the turn of the century, meant snob, cake-eater—Protestant, even. (Anna Magnani, as these people will point out to you, was not a Northern Italian.) Number two, Marcella Hazan tried to *demystify* Italian cooking, turn it over to non-Italians. In America, anyone can be President, and in Marcella Hazan anyone can make minestrone.

This worried my husband. Pretty soon, he figured, you'd have Basques, Northumbrians, British Columbians making Italian dinners. He preferred cookbooks that kept a few veils on. A favorite of his was Ada Boni's "Talisman Italian Cook Book," which you used to be able to get by sending in four dollars and ninety-five cents with a coupon from the Ronzoni box. Ada Boni called for things like "1 large can Italian tomatoes." How large? Only an Italian would know. Best of all, he would have liked a cookbook that said, "Take a handful of chopped meat, add some parsley, throw it in the *scolabast*. . . ." That would keep the Northumbrians out of the kitchen.



IVAN PAVLEV

The menu of his Christmas Eve feast changed from year to year, but certain items remained constant. For the appetizer course, he always served *mozzarella in carrozza*, because everyone loved it. For the salad course, he always had Ada Boni's shrimp-and-potato salad, because I loved it. And he always made marinated eel, because he liked to drive everyone crazy with it.

He had a weakness for food machismo—that is, he prided himself on eating what you wouldn't. Tripe was nothing to him; he ate necks, tails, toes. One of the things he loved best was when we were out to dinner with friends and someone confessed an unwillingness to eat certain animal parts. Then he would tell the story of how the biggest treat in his grandfather's house was *capuzzell*, or sheep's head. They would take this head, roast it, and hoist it out onto a platter. Then Grandpa would crack it open. ("Stop! Stop!" we're all yelling at my husband by now. But there was no stopping him.) Grandpa would crack it open and then stick in the spoon and scoop out ("No! Please!")—Grandpa would scoop out the brains onto everyone's plate. The people who were really lucky got the ("No, Nick! Don't tell us!")—the people who were lucky got the eyeballs. The story thus triumphantly finished, our dinner companions would look down glassy-eyed at their plates, push them away, and order a drink. And my husband, glowing with happiness and ethnic pride, would pick up his fork and dig into whatever was in front of him—ears, probably.

That's why he liked the marinated eel. Right around the fourth course of the Christmas Eve feast, he would produce it: a big dead snake in a bowl of yellow oil. "No!" we would scream. "Take it away! Eat it in the kitchen!" And, beaming with joy, he would maneuver the thing onto his plate, eat it by himself, and look at us pityingly.

The rest was magnificent, though: mussel soup, spaghetti with scallops, baccalà with olives, bass stuffed with vegetables. This year, he'll probably be cooking it again, for a tableful of cousins. I can see them now, happily lifting their forks. "Wait!" he says, and runs back to the kitchen for the eel. ♦

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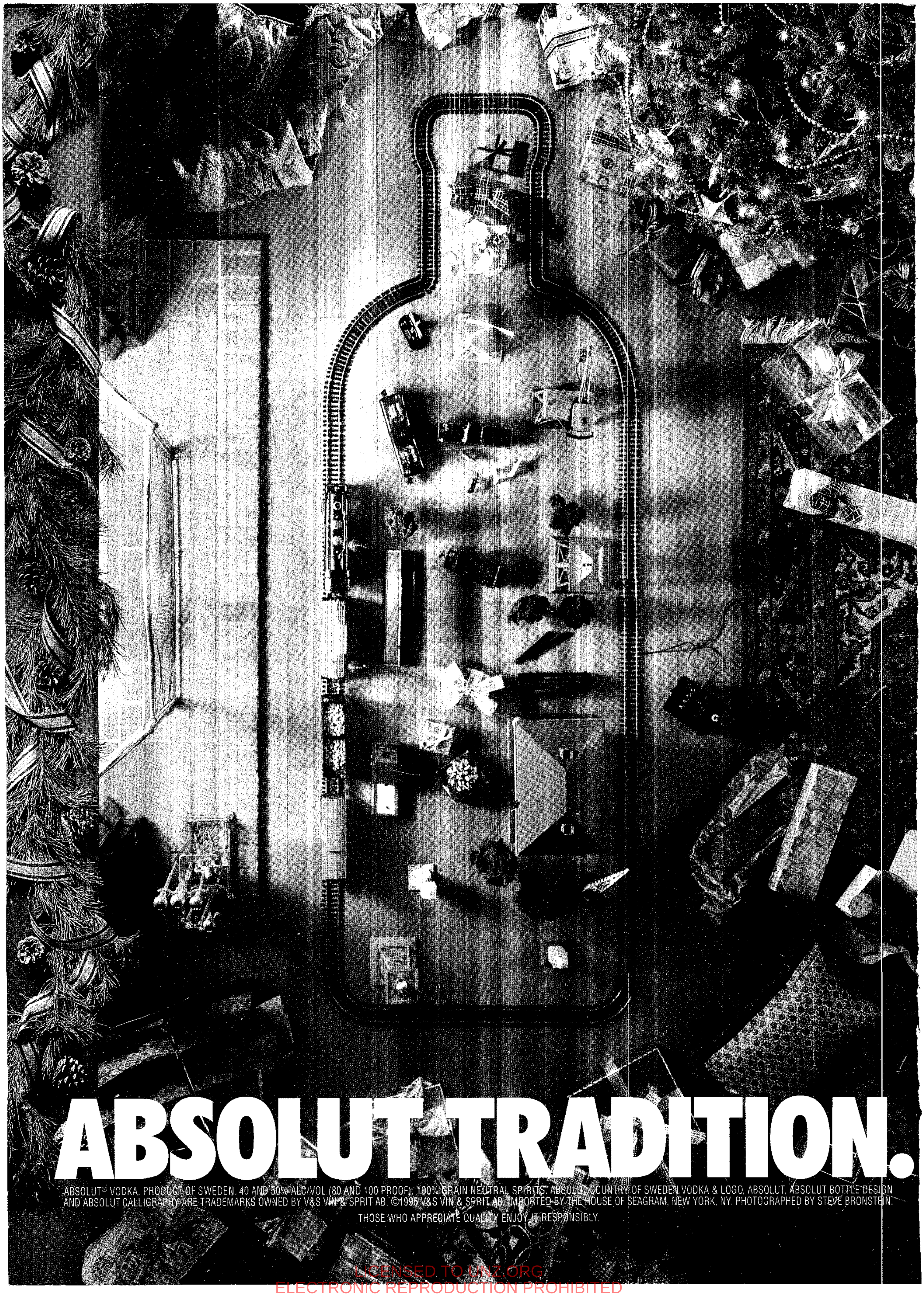

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